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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Terrence Schofield

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2016

Abstract

Perceptions of Marital Dissatisfaction Among African American Couples

by

Terrence Schofield

MS, Walden University, 2012

BS, Knoxville College, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

August 2016

Abstract

African Americans experience greater rates of marriage dissatisfaction than do other ethnic groups. However, research on perceived coping, attachment, and socioeconomic factors primarily focus on Caucasian experiences. The purpose of this study was to determine if coping, attachment, and socioeconomic influences were contributors to perceptions of marriage dissatisfaction for African Americans. The study's theoretical foundation explored attachment-style perceptions of dissatisfaction. A phenomenological method was used to understand how attachment, coping, and socioeconomic factors contribute to marital dissatisfaction and to determine the type of emotional behaviors that indicated dissatisfaction. A sample of 7 married African American individuals was recruited through a local community church. Interview data regarding the perceived dissatisfaction experiences and coping strategies in African American marriages were inductively analyzed. Findings revealed the absence of being happy, inability to communicate, mediating differences, family issues, and socioeconomic concerns as contributors to their perceived marriage dissatisfaction. Findings also suggested that their dissatisfaction stemmed from coping, attachment, and socioeconomic concerns. These emergent themes are not unique from literature among other ethnic groups, suggesting a shared understanding of marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction among all individuals. These findings may bring about positive social change by broadening the scope of discussions among social scientists and mental health professionals about marital satisfaction across racial and ethnic groups.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

This study focused on similarities between perceived distress and marital dissatisfaction among married African American couples. The following research was undertaken to better understand perceptions of marital dissatisfaction in relation to coping, attachment, and socio-economic contributors to marital dissatisfaction. Perceptions influence moods, whereas circumstances enhance or reduce the magnitude of certain conditions (Avramova, Stapel, & Lerouge, 2010). These perceived behavioral responses and conditions, within the context of marriage, are best understood as learned processes of managing emotions through lived experiences. These lived experiences are tested through controlled and non-controlled environments. An emotional response is an elicited reaction from evaluating the degree a person's needs are fulfilled or not fulfilled in relation to the environment (Greenberg, 2012). Limited research is available to help understand the ways various family attachments, coping, and socioeconomic factors contribute to marital distress within the African American context and experience, and little research has been performed on the African American family experience (Marks, Tanner, Nesteruk, Chaney, & Baumgartner, 2012). In major sections of my study, I focused on various attachment styles, socioeconomic factors, and coping issues that contribute to forming perceived marital dissatisfaction among African American couples. There is limited research centered on attachment and coping within the context of chronic diseases (Bazzazian, & Besharat, 2012).

Background

The historical background of marriage among African American couples is replete with accounts of fact and fiction. Butler-Mokoro (2010) stated that many slaves and free Blacks were illiterate and most could not record first-person stories. As a result, accurate sources have been misinterpreted when written from secondary sources. Historical data concerning historical views held of marriage among African Americans are best understood circumstantially within the socio-contextual condition of its time. Early perceptions of African American marriages were affected by distance created by slavery, which was a major contributor to dissolved marriages among slaves. This is similar to modern day issues of poverty and high African American male imprisonment, which totals 1.5 million in United States federal prisons, and an additional 700,000 in local jails. I sought to provide an understanding of how thoughts, feelings, and unwanted emotions contribute to distress in various marital and interpersonal relationships.

More research is needed on personality and behavioral factors that contribute to marital distress, especially among African American couples. Alarming statistics reveal that African American marriages possess the steepest declination rates among all ethnic populations in the United States (Pinderhughes, 2002). Research on perceived marriage dissatisfaction is also needed to gain better insight into marriages from African American perspectives (Marks, Nesteruk, Hopkins-Williams, Swanson, & Davis, 2006).

The U.S. Census Bureau found that 42% of African American adults are married compared to 61% of Caucasians and 49% of Hispanic marriages. Approximately 68% of African American children are birthed by unmarried mothers, in comparison with only

29% of Caucasians and 44% of Hispanics. More than 62% of African American households are single-parent homes, in comparison with 27% of Caucasian and 35% of Hispanic single-parent households (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011).

Divorce is a traumatic event that may develop from low personal satisfaction within marriage relationships. The uncertainty of divorce and related factors makes it difficult to explain and therefore prevent recovery from both its negative and positive experiences (Zarzosa & Somarriba, 2013). Among African American young females 18 years old and older, 43% have never been married (Duncan, 2012). In addition, African American women younger than 25 years have an 81% likelihood of remarrying within 10 years of divorce, whereas women older than 25 years have a 68% likelihood of remarrying after a divorce (Humble, 2009). These statistics likely result from the growing acceptance of the ease of getting out of unhappy marriages, the establishment of no-fault divorce legislations, and the growing population of economic independent women in American communities.

The increase of divorce rates illustrates that high levels of marriage disaffection exists. Most marriages that I examined in this dissertation were associated with marital unhappiness relative to socioeconomic, attachment history of problems, and coping stressors as contributors that reduce marriage quality (Woody, 2009). Miller, Sassler, and Kusi-Appouh (2011) surveyed 43.1% of males in high school who stated it was unlikely that they would remain married to the same person. This study reveals the nihilistic view of marriage and the ease with which to dissolve mutual relationships. Duncan (2012) revealed a higher rate of 57% of previously married couples who were married and now

divorced, which suggests the scarcity of Black males as the reason for the lack of marriageable individuals among African Americans. High incarceration rates of African American males were the primary factor. This lack of African American men has increased interracial marriages, which has produced fewer marriageable Black men. African American males have a 2.56% higher rate of being in a concurrent relationship than White males (Nunn et al., 2011). These statistics have reduced the marketability of the African American male within the dating field.

Another major cause of most marital displeasure is encountering negative personalities, which I discuss in the controlling personalities section of the literature review. When spouses perceive their mates critically, they become more negative, which contributes to a decline in marital satisfaction (Schoebi, Perrez, & Bradbury, 2012). Consequently, when a spouse experiences such significant levels of negative interactions and increased levels of conflict from their mate, these experiences can develop into dissatisfied feelings and create an emotional wall between future positive encounters within the relationship (Schoebi, Way, Karney, & Bradbury, 2012). These emotional interactions lead to feelings that contribute to loss of confidence and mate distress. Especially among African Americans, encounters with racism and various societal prejudices can become an acute source of stress and negatively affect the family experience (Lincoln & Chae, 2012). Often this loss of confidence can lead to a decreasing desire to cope with future relationship challenges. These feelings, when left unchecked, can procure undesired thoughts and feelings and grow into undesirable emotions. Personality displeasure is linked to an individual's internalized negative perceptions of

others and themselves. Displeasure surfaces during times when individuals deal with conflict, transfer relationship support, distribute emotions intimately, live out the balance of power within relationships, and attempt to problem solve (Brock & Lawrence, 2011).

Among African Americans, dissatisfaction contains constraints that alter personality and thought. The theory of constraint suggests that humans react in contrasting ways by failing to choose right at the expense of doing wrong (Birkin, Polesie, & Lewis, 2009). This contributes to future mate displeasure choices in a variety of situations and relationships. For instance, African Americans place a strong value on family and marriage, but this value does not translate into increased desire for marriages within most African American populations (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Some of these constraints are personally endured as a result of vulnerabilities, unresolved family relationship conflict, and community and social constraints that prevent African Americans from access to employment, which would alleviate economic stressors. Breunlin (2009) stated in his theory of constraint that people's thoughts and actions result from prior prohibited experiences.

Inherited behaviors passed down through other generations can also contribute to distress and displeasure among African Americans. Inherent effects suggest that these behaviors have inherited negative tendencies that contribute to variations in subjective long and short-term well-being (McCann, 2011). These learned behaviors contribute to long and short-term well-being and can carry over into adulthood experiences. For instance, if a particular region contains many individuals with a high propensity for unpleasant emotions, the behavioral and psychosocial effects could continue, and affect

surrounding individuals within this population. This is true even among those who did not score high on exhibiting unpleasant emotional behavior. Exposure among highly anxious, stressful, and irritable environments can transfer and cause unstable psychosocial stress among people living within such environments (McCann, 2011). African Americans have a history and are more likely statistically to either live in or experience these environments during their lifetimes.

African American couples living within low-income contexts are laden with unalterable experiences that contribute to individuals having a low self-concept and psychological distress. Tolan, Lovegrove, and Clark (2013) stated that families residing in low-income environments have to contend with a variety of life stressors at elevated levels as a result of their environment; these stressors affect their overall well-being and health. Stressors associated from living in communities that have fewer economic and social structural resources increase the risk of emotional and social problems. Exposure among these unalterable experiences can contribute to stress within relationships and alter couples' perceptions of their quality of marital functioning and relationship stability.

Maintaining emotional stability is difficult in marital environments surrounded by unalterable situations. In limited controlled environments, levels of anxiety increased due to the lack of control that individuals sensed within their environments of low-socioeconomic environments, single-parent households, traumatic childhood experiences, and partner violence encounters that are discussed at length in the literature review section of this paper. As a result of living within the limited controlled environments

mentioned earlier, anxiety and somatic behaviors peak in response to unalterable situations they cannot control or alter.

Factors contributing to marital distress are associated with interpersonal conflict and balance of power roles, which can produce negative effects. These effects include unpleasant moods, emotions, and lack of positive responses such as anxiousness, frustration, sadness, stress, worry, guilt, and shameful feelings that are strongly tied to negative effects and to individuals' overall life experiences (McCann, 2011).

Problem-solving issues continue to surface also as a result of increased frequency and length of interpersonal exposure to constant argumentative environments. These environments are portrayed during conflict situations, exhibited aggression during times of conflict, and couples recovery time after difficult altercations. A form of displeasure sets in during this critical time when couples transfer and sense a need for support in relationships when support is absent. In terms of personality and intimate interactions, these displeasures are observable through the lens of the couple's expression of their feelings of closeness, how they exhibit said affection among others through their own form of self-expression, and how they balance power roles within their relationships (Brock & Lawrence, 2011).

In relation to control or limited control and instability of emotions, further research on the origin of personality and behavior offers deeper insight into the coexistence of emotions and thoughts. Thoughts surface from the process of analyzing and generalizing, which underscore the need to check whether emotions indicate that something must be done (Dalglish, 2009). Personalities are not isolated phenomena;

they are interwoven into people's ideas on one side and into their bodies on the other. Personalities, interpersonal issues, ancestral traits, and negative environments are major contributors to marital dissatisfaction, as are feelings of guilt and holding onto a belief that the situation may improve (Træen, 2010). More research is needed to better understand these underlying factors to reduce encounters with marital distress.

Further understanding and research are needed to help identify underlying factors that promote personality and behavioral adjustments in difficult marriage relationships among African Americans. A significant amount of African American family interpersonal relationships are complicated as a result of their daily encounters in poor economic and social conditions, which increase the likelihood of dissatisfied interpersonal relations and family distress. Statistically, 25.1% of African American adults are below the federal poverty level, 34.5% of African American children reside in impoverished conditions, and 29% of African American families are headed by single women who have the highest poverty rank of 39% among all ethnic groups in the United States (Taylor & Budescu, 2013).

Behavioral adjustments are major components that alter personal satisfaction within interrelationships. Studies revealed similarities between a wide range of relational situations that include satisfaction, quality, and stableness in relationships and personalities. More in depth studies are needed on interpersonal personality traits and their association with interpersonal behavior and how encounters with these behaviors contribute to relational dissolution and dissatisfaction personalities that are vital in understanding contributing factors within the relationship experience. Our interpersonal

relationship experiences are the central focal point of reference in understanding various personality expressions. These various ways of expression provide insight into methods in which to analyze individual personality choices to various situations. Behavior influences the sequence choices of our interactions, which helps us become more aware of how a person initiates a sequence of interactive behavior and provides the lens through which to reference personal perceptions and behavior response choices (Hines & Saudino, 2008).

Maintaining a healthy and sustaining marriage requires basic elements. Couples enter into relationships with various perceptions of the relationship. Historically among most African American females, perception of the traditional male as the patriarchal provider has created contention. These paternal contentions triggers anxiety and various other psychological feelings within African American males, especially as fathers with no other reference other than rejection, because human behavior is largely socially transmitted (Aymer, 2010). One reason for this conflict goes as far back as slavery. This view is substantiated through the historical mistreatment and emasculation of the African American male. Chambers & Kravitz (2011) suggested that emasculation has inadvertently contributed to the African American female's skeptical view of the patriarchal family and the ideology of the African/African American male's ability to become the patriarchal father of the family unit. Such historical misperceptions of the European patriarchal family idiom and the African American way of survival under such idiom has evolved and created a wedge between male and female interrelationships and their perception of each other in terms of proper marital roles. In addition, gender role

confusion from the witnessed and perceived stress on African American females and their feelings of being torn contrasts to the White perceived patriarchal model, which contributes to tense gender relations. The high divorce and low marriage rates among African Americans may mirror the gender role confusion over time caused by the image of the European patriarchal and matriarchal marriage symbol and the unrealistic reality within the African American marriage experience. These unpleasant realities often promote help-seeking behavior and unpleasant emotions. For instance, research on people who exhibit help-seeking behavior also exhibit high incidents of unpleasant emotions. Research has suggested that help-seeking behavior correlates with the experience of emotional distress (Kakhnovets, 2011). Further, when a person exhibits and holds onto more negative behavior toward a spouse, couples are more negatively perceived and dissatisfied in the relationship. This perceived dissatisfaction is exhibited in other forms of the couple's interrelationship and possibly the way one spouse behaves in a certain manner will predict how the other will behave (Durtschi, Fincham, Cui, Lorenz, & Conger, 2011).

Attitudes and psychological aggression are important factors in marital satisfaction and are modeled differently between males and females. Unpleasant emotions are familiar behavior among males and females who exhibit psychological aggression. These emotions are common, specifically among women who exhibit a sense of independence, self-constraint, and a high drive to succeed. These women will likely exhibit psychological aggression toward their partner (Hines & Saudino, 2008). In a survey among African American women older than 35 years with a desire to be married,

results stated that marriage represented a sense of reduction of control and power they desired not to give up (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011).

One of the most negative relationship environments is one where individuals struggle over maintaining a mutual sense of interdependence. Negative emotional exchanges between individuals contribute to an inability to regulate one's emotions (Lindsey, Chambers, Frabutt, & Mackinnon-Lewis, 2009). The goal of the individual in the relationship is to maintain a sense of his or her own individuality. Interdependent relationship studies suggests many people will choose to remain in unsatisfying relationships because of the dependence they have on the marriage union for satisfaction, regardless of dissatisfied feelings of being locked into a troubled marriage and the inability to step back from difficulties in solving relationship problems (Liu, Rovine, Cousino & Almeida, 2013).

Aron and Aron (2010) said the "should I stay or should I go" decision should be based on factors demonstrated in Rusbult's investment model. This model suggests that couples provide mutual inclusive ways of coexisting, which ultimately builds a positive sense of self and mutual value in couple's interrelationship.

Armon, Shirom, and Melamed (2012) stated that a host of societal issues takes root in relationship problems, which often include problems such as psychological illness, substance abuse, disease, domestic violence, employment problems, and even a higher likelihood of involvement in major traffic accidents. Unpleasant emotions are traits that cause people to have a tendency to perceive life events in a negative manner. This type of emotion develops negative perceptions as a result of its internalized

perceived pessimism. Rather than address external factors, people internalize feelings that result in negativity and deep-rooted pessimism.

Unresolved emotions and anger are measurable in terms of environments that reinforce such habits and behavior. Nevarez, Weinman, Buzi, and Smith (2009) studied 25 young fathers from inner cities, 13 of which were African American, six were Hispanic, and six were Caucasian. They found that only one father was married and most of these fathers stated that the community in which they were reared had high levels of poverty and violence. A majority of these fathers stated that they had great relationships with their mothers but not with their fathers. This altered their own ability to believe that they could be a good father based on their own absent-father paradigm. This caused problems in referencing what a mature father or husband looks like within the context of the marital relationship and a personal lack of sensing they could be a mature father.

In terms of African American females, transference can take the place through mothers who may transmit messages to their daughters about marriage. Daughters of unmarried mothers are more prone than other young women to become young and unmarried, because a young woman's expectations of marriage can be influenced by her mother's marital expectations (Oberlander, Agostini, Houston, & Black, 2010).

From a human development perspective, most perceptions are formed from exposure to life events. If pessimism survives, it is a learned behavior and is carried into life situations including relationships, which can lead to the formation of major depressive behaviors. The pessimism that leads to depression is a behavior that forms as a result of several factors, but research has long supported the fact that the context and

perception of an individual's social and physical environment has a major influence on their mental health. Merely fantasizing about one's future without a positive belief and plan to produce one can affect one's mental health in a variety of negative ways (Sergeant & Mongrain, 2014). Ecological traumatic studies support the view that cultural, community, and social factors determine the level of response to and recovery from traumatic events. It is well documented that exposure to traumatic experiences may alter a person's mental health (Tummala–Narra, Li, Liu, & Wang, 2014). Risk factors associated with depression, and being Black in America, correlate more strongly to African Americans than those of other nationalities. In a three-dimension neighborhood study of the multiple effects of environment and depression, results revealed that socioeconomic environments are a protector against worsening depression. Of the two noted positive and negative dimensions, affluence was positive and disadvantaged environments were negative and worsened depressive factors (Beard et al., 2009). These socio-environmental conditions are major contributors that alter emotions and personalities, and increase negative perceptions. Identifying these emotional perceived conditions is paramount to reduce marital distress.

In this study, I attempted to fill the gap in literature that has failed to identify emotional difficulties among African American couples in high maintenance relationships as synonymous with the cause of marital distress. The manner in which couples interact with each other will determine the level of negative or positive perception of the interrelationship (Macher, 2013). Various studies predicting interactions between perceived distress and perseverance revealed correlations with high levels of

distress and health consequences. An interpersonal conflict study of relationships within environments of yelling, cursing, and verbal threat, increased one's risk of cognitive impairments and chronic disease (El-Sheikh, Kelly, & Rauer, 2013). These unpleasant emotions are the result of people in high-controlling relationship environments, where preservation is the utopic response. This response trait produce a measure of trait-perseverance consistent with survival in the right setting, but it can be perceived as unproductive in environments and experiences perceived to be desperate, unrealistic, or misleading (Robinson, Wilkowski, Kirkeby, & Meier, 2006).

There is a dearth of information with regard to insights of distressed relationships of African American married couples (Cutrona, et al. 2003), and more research is needed to understand how perceived coping and attachment issues contribute to marital dissatisfaction among African American couples. Greater research in this area is needed to understand distress from the lens of the African American perspective and reduce irrelevant conclusions written outside of its cultural context.

Statement of Problem

Marital displeasure is synonymous to emotional dissatisfaction and unpleasant emotions. As a result, recent research reveal these unpleasant emotions can develop into personality problems such as antisocial behaviors, anger control problems, and adjustment issues that can create contention with others and form several internal distressed emotions (Žunić-Pavlović, Pavlović, Kovačević-Lepojević, Glumbić, & Kovačević, 2013). Personality of a spouse can influence a person's mood in various ways. People's actions take place within interpersonal contexts and their decisions and

beliefs are not only shaped by their own but others also (Rothman, Klein, & Cameron, 2013). For instance, in relation to depression, a study revealed when women became depressed their depressive moods suppressed their mate's aggressive behavior (Foran, et al. 2012).

Hudson, Neighbors, Geronimus, & Jackson (2012) found in their study on African American women and depression, that the status of marriage did not reduce a women's tendency to attract depression. Women tend to exert more emotional energy in a marriage than men. As a result, marital dissatisfaction is a larger contributor to depression among women than men. In retrospect, the same study revealed greater likelihood of depression among married African American men than single men, which suggests being unmarried is a buffer against contracting depression among African American males.

Encounters with anger and unresolved emotional conflict validate the unpleasant personality experience. Within the context of marriage, personality and emotions are best understood as a learned process of managing them through lived experiences. These lived experiences are tested through the process of emotional control, comfort level with emotional expressions, skill of recognizing and talking through emotions, and expressions of empathy. In light of this view, emotional challenges are one of the greatest determinants of a marriages solidity, value, and closeness (Schulz, & Waldinger, 2010). This is why marital displeasure is closely associated with an individual's perceived ability to adequately deal with personality conflict. Although data exists on marital satisfaction, limited data is available on perceptions of marital dissatisfaction among African American couples.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of marital dissatisfaction and how these contribute to the formation of dissatisfaction among African American married couples. This study will provide an understanding of how couples thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are attributed to perceived marital dissatisfaction within various social and relational environments. Within the United States, the divorce to marriage ratio among its population is 50%. In 2008, there were 7.1 marriages per 1,000 and 3.5 divorces per 1,000 people within the United States population. The perception of the institution of marriage is changing from a mutual union to a personal choice (Aniciete, and Soloski, 2011).

The results of this study could lead to positive social change by providing insights into ways marital dissatisfaction can be understood, monitored, and positively lived out in mutually harmonious interrelationships. Insights from this study will help couples promote a sense of healthy self-awareness and appreciation of others in relation to dealing with difficult personality conflicts and interrelationships contributing to unhealthy personal and mutual growth. Awareness of these perceptions into marital dissatisfaction will provide a step toward dismantling dysfunctional communication and irrational happiness toward promoting a broader appreciation of oneself and humanity within a global socio-cultural context.

This study will provide a framework for understanding the beliefs and emotional responses that contribute to issues of marital dissatisfaction and will also identify potential coping strategies for addressing those issues. If greater understanding of the

emotions contributing to marital dissatisfaction could be identified and understood, then future research could help reduce negative views within emotionally challenged interrelationships. Future research could also help contribute to healthier perspectives among couples and families and also aid in reducing biases in conflict that could lead to positive social change. Though causes of marital dissatisfaction among White ethnic groups are well established, perceptions of attachment, coping, and socioeconomic status among African American couples could offer some clues to an area that should be studied in this population. A sample of African American couples will be examined to explore their perceptions in these promising areas.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do African American couples define their marriage?

RQ2. How do coping mechanism and attachment styles contribute to marital dissatisfaction?

RQ3. How do African American couples feel their socioeconomic experiences can influence their marriage?

A spouse's marital distress creates increased dissatisfaction and more hostility in the relationship. Within this study, methods of an actor/partner model of measuring couples marital distress scores to obtain greater interdependent results will be used. This means that resultant scores from both individuals can provide information about the other persons score and both scores can also be considered interdependently of the other. The utilization of the actor/partner method is one of the best measurements of behavioral and marital functioning and reveals a key link between a person's marital adjustment and

psychopathology. Consistent findings revealed an individual's personality can impact their own marital adjustment; this is known as the actor effects. Additionally, one's behavior can affect the other partner's marital adjustment (Knabb & Vogt, 2011). In the past, results from partner effect analysis tests like this proved beneficial in discovering associations between wives' marital satisfaction and husbands' depressive symptoms (Miller et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The two theoretical foundations for this study will examine how themes of behavior are associated with Marital Distress, in particular perceptual and emotional themes between dimensions and expressions of behavior among African American couples.

The theoretical framework is a phenomenological study. Creswell (2009) noted that a qualitative framework phenomenological study is the best method available because it helps to link together the ideas of participants within the same shared experience. Other forms of data will be analyzed in conjunction with semi-instructed interviews, which enable the researcher and participant within the interview process to collectively construct the meaning of the phenomenon through the interview process experience (Doutre, Green, & Knight-Elliott, 2013) which are inherent in the theme of phenomenological studies.

Although there is research on positive behavioral expressions and marital satisfaction, there is no research on coping, attachment, and socioeconomic factors and marital dissatisfaction among marital distressed couples. Incoherent themes of unresolved

conflict, poor support, communication, and quality interactions are themes of personalities that are synonymous with marital dissatisfaction (Lavner, & Bradbury, 2012).

The aim of this study is to examine themes between African American couple's perceived dissatisfaction and actual marital distress and how these are perceived within couple's shared experiences. Additional research will be discussed in regards to social, personal, and environmental factors and their contribution to marital dissatisfaction under stressful conditions. Behavioral changes of individuals are the result of personal, environmental, and social factors (Gordon, 2011).

Phenomenological and qualitative theoretical foundations used for this study. These theories will examine various themes of personalities within shared experiences and perceived dissatisfaction under stressful conditions in terms of understanding couple's coping and attachment styles under negative environments and how these contribute to emotional dissatisfaction in marriage interrelationships. The phenomenological approach involves identifying phenomena and uses participant's responses to open-ended questions to describe how the participants live out the phenomena in everyday life (Grimes, Haskins, & Paisley, 2013). Qualitative study is the collection of first person material to provide general scientific understanding and knowledge of a particular person's experience or issue (Wertz, 2014).

The theoretical framework of perceived dissatisfaction is observable within shared experiences and is an appropriate way to measure learned behavior under various conditions. Additional research in this paper will review attachment styles, personality,

and emotional dissatisfied behaviors in the context of coping and shared experiences within various family, socioeconomic, and interpersonal settings within the Literature Review section of Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

An exploratory qualitative method study was used among African American couples who have been at least married one year, to provide information and to identify perceived contributors to marital dissatisfaction among African American couples as a result of their encounters with various conditions within the marital relationship. The qualitative method is essential for this study because the phenomenological study and qualitative survey tests rely on the personal experience of marital distress in the participants' lives, which are best expressed in categorical not continuous terms. The qualitative approach is a type of research that seeks to understand, examine, and describe the experiences of people or issues under investigation (Haskins et al., 2013). Participants within the desired age range of 30 to 55 years tend to have a clear sense of what dissatisfied problems and marital distress mean. Crisis during the middle age is a period of deepening one's meaning of existence (Weaver, 2009).

In retrospect, quantitative study (or) regression analysis would not give the in-depth information needed from the interview for this selected African American study group. Qualitative studies are designed to look at perspectives from others in order to experience meaning through the eyes and thoughts of others (Hallberg, 2013).

Quantitative studies are more concerned with obtaining perspectives through statistical analyses to prove the validity of findings (Osborne, 2013). Generalizations cannot be

performed in the same way as results based on quantitative studies. Quantitative studies are more often based on random samples from a defined group. Qualitative study is based on in-depth information from a strategically selected study group that can be tested in other contexts to validate its results. It focuses on gaining such in-depth understanding and explores meanings and processes of everyday life (Hallberg, 2013).

Causal effects of European couples in terms of marital distress have been studied, however there is a lack of literature written to help understand marital distress within the context of the African American experience in relation to coping, attachment, and socioeconomic factors. When researching new topics and unexplored ground, qualitative studies should be used at the beginning, then followed up with quantitative studies (such as a regression analysis) to help construct equation models from which causal effects can be estimated (Berk, 2010). A regression analysis does not work in this case of plowing new ground for new information and understanding in terms of illustrating, and explaining African American distress within the experience of coping difficulties, attachment styles, and the influence of various socioeconomic factors.

Research methodology will use interviews and open-ended questionnaires that provide qualitative thematic information. Friborg and Rosenvinge (2013) stated that open-ended questions help research come as close to the natural conversation within a survey and provide more in depth explanation of the human motives behind the occurrence of phenomena. The interview questionnaires allow individuals to account for their values, behavior, mannerism, and viewpoints. Various methods of research excel in

the area of exploring themes of complicated phenomena from a variety of different perspectives (Gambrel & Butler, 2013).

To discover generalizations between perceived distress and marital dissatisfaction, a qualitative design involving in-depth interviews and observational themes was used among community volunteer couples to examine trends between expressivity of unpleasant emotions and their association with marital distress. The “why” question within qualitative study should allow individuals to give accounts for their values, behavior, mannerism, and viewpoints. Qualitative research overall is generally defined as a method of gaining understanding of the meaning of behavior (Gordon, 2011). Data was gathered from an anonymous group of African American married individuals to attempt to understand the meaning of their perceptions of marital dissatisfaction within various coping, attachment, and socioeconomic experiences.

Specifically among African Americans, negative interactions within their environment can increase the likelihood of poor internal and external problems over time (Taylor, 2010). For this reason, most of the key research terms used were: African American relationships, dissatisfaction and marriage, coping and socioeconomic factors, relationship issues, marital dissatisfaction, emotional dissatisfaction, African American couples, and combination search terms of poverty, divorce, conflict, satisfaction and African American marriages. The search engines that were used for this dissertation were accessed through the Walden University online library. Most of the data were obtained through the psych info search engine.

Definition of Terms

It is important that the reader is familiar with several terms used throughout this dissertation. In order to facilitate this understanding the below-listed definitions are provided to assist the reader.

Unpleasant emotions are described as a chronic tendency of an individual's experience of negative thoughts and feelings of anxiety, anger, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability. Individuals who experience these on a chronic level are more prone to emotional distress (Wasylikiw, Fabrigar, Rainboth, Reid, & Steen, 2010).

Attachment is described as the relational bond between mother and child and the secure emotional bond between two individuals. Character traits are listed as support, care, trustworthiness, and personal acceptance. The three types of attachment styles are security, anxiousness, and avoidant attachments. Resolved and unresolved attachments evolve in the individual as they develop from a child into adulthood, though unresolved attachments are more associated with past traumatic experiences (Reiner & Spangler, 2013).

Research from a social-cognitive view of attachment describes this emotional behavior among interrelationships as a change in one's feeling about how attached they are in relation to their positive or negative mental perception of their attachment. As a result, positive relationship climates resulted in increased commitment among partners and inadvertently increased perceived feelings of secure attachments. Couple's measured levels of attachment feelings and modeled behaviors revealed increased feelings of

attachment security among partners who promoted more positivity within the relationship, decreased anxiety, and avoidant tendencies. Partners who showed more negative behaviors proved to have decreased levels of attachment security, which increase anxiousness (Adams & Baptist, 2012).

Interdependency is defined as the shared affection between mutually different individuals and the way they express this mutuality through their way of thinking, emoting, or exhibiting behavior. Interdependency is a major element of romantic relationships (De Smet, Loeys, & Buysse, 2013).

Efficient Coping Behavior is a type of behavior personified in secure marital couples. This secure coping behavior stems from a secure base perception of parents during childhood and extends well into the mature child's adult relationship (Woodhouse, Dykas, & Cassidy, 2009).

There have been many studies on coping, attachment, and measurement of individual couple's differences and situational influences and how couples disengage during conflict. Multiple studies reveal that disengagement (an attachment behavior) is heightened especially during times where couples are having difficulty interacting during a distressful situation (Barry & Lawrence, 2013)

Irrational Coping Attachments are preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachments. A preoccupied attached person has negative feelings about the self and positive feelings about others, uneasiness with feelings of receiving love, and fear of being accepted by others. Dismissing attachment, they think they deserve love but fear

others will reject them. Fearful, attached people tend to have a negative sense of self-worth and think others will reject them (Ehrenberg, Robertson, & Pringle, 2012).

Sexual infidelity is one of the largest reasons couples choose divorce. Over 50% to 65% of couples that therapists see have experienced infidelity. The three types of infidelities are emotional affairs (time and attention, to another person), sexual affairs (sexual activity with another person), and combined affairs (both of the above). These affairs are the primary threat to marriages and the major contributor to irreconcilable differences in marital relationships. The four levels of how people perceive themselves and the image of someone else determine ways adults sense they are valued, their expectations of the other person, and their view of the presence of others within the relationship. These four levels of how individuals balance anxiety and avoidance in relationships are secure (high self-concept and high view of others), fearful (low self-concept, negative perceptions of others) dismissing (high self-concept and low perceptions of others), and preoccupied (high concept of others, low self-concept). Those who struggle with dependency issues emotionally respond and retract as a form of protecting themselves. People who cannot handle their anxiety will have less control over their emotions (Fish, Pavkov, Wetchler, & Bercik, 2012), which if not handled or addressed properly can lead to infidelity. One recent study suggested that since African American and Hispanic cultures are always on the move within their culturally setting to emotionally and physically survive, they view having an acquaintance on the side as a form of survival (Macauda, et al., 2011).

Actor/Partner Independence Model (APIM) is a research measure that helps discover how independent couples react and how these influences affect interrelationships. For instance, a person may exhibit selfish motives in choices and values that contribute to their own personal satisfaction, but may also be very open and unselfish in certain situations that increase their mate's relationship satisfaction. The actor part of the APIM measures the effect an individual's development contributes to current behavior. The partner's effect describes the influence the actor's behavior has on their partner (Rogers, Bidwell, & Wilson, 2005).

Emotional Expressed Behavior is defined as the act of allowing someone to express the way they feel, reveal their feelings, and have the time to express these feelings verbally and nonverbally (Senol-Durak & Durak, 2011).

Power styles are learned behaviors in relationships developed over time. In terms of marital relationships, Rogers, Bidwell, & Wilson (2005) suggested that power is usually understood from the perspective of resources and is used to gain control in most relationships. The power of emotions, power perceptions, problem solving ability, intimidation of others, or persuasive ability to exert power within relationships are other major power plays that individuals play out in relationships.

Assumptions

There are several assumptions, delimitations, and limitations associated with this research study. First, it was assumed that instruments used within this paper were used to determine if the constructs of interest were reliable and valid. It was also assumed that the interview completed by each participant was accurate and honest.

Another assumption of this paper assumes there are factors other than personal awareness that also impact the success of couples exhibiting emotionally dissatisfied personalities in distressful relationships.

This paper assumes couples are likely to exhibit some form of attachment or coping difficulty, are likely to interact with someone else of the opposite sex, and that a social context exists that may produce some form of emotional or behavioral conflict

Delimitations

The population was delimited to African American married individuals who were married at least one year and members of churches and social organizations within Mecklenburg County of Charlotte, North Carolina. All participants who met these criteria were allowed to participate in the study.

This study focused on individual experiences alone rather than empirical data to answer the research questions through a qualitative study method. Observational interview results within this report depended solely on participant perceptions of experiences and events. All results included some subjectivity, and there was no verifiable guarantee of accuracy.

The study did not include a quantitative analysis of any demographic data or its potential linkages to the experiences or outcomes of clients or their identified qualities. Although these factors may have had an effect on the experiences of clients, demography had been determined to be outside of the bounds of the study because of the complexity of the arguments that link to couples' emotional interrelationships and distressful interrelationship cultures. This study's focal point viewed distress or dissatisfaction

through the lens of mental, physical, and situational observations of distress not demographics. Past research supports the hypothesis that marital distress has a strong association with levels of mental and physical psychopathology (Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012).

Because this project established only observational results, no causation could be determined. Additionally, all data on the nature of individual emotionally dissatisfied behavior would be limited to the participants' own perceptions and would not be quantified or collected for the purpose of this study.

The sample population referred to herein are from the Charlotte, North Carolina area. Because this study was limited to one location, including this community context and the institution alone, it may be limited in its generalizability and transferability.

This investigation was also limited to one instrument, the interview detailed in the Appendix. This means that there may be factors of a person's individual mental health and family that were not captured within each study

Limitations

This study was limited to heterosexual African American couples who were married at least one year. This research was limited in several regards. One limitation was the South County Regional library setting in which the interview research was given and conducted in an urban setting in Mecklenburg County leaving out a large number of African Americans who resided in rural areas and other geographic locations outside of Mecklenburg County and the state of North Carolina. This omission could produce results that cannot be generalized back to the population of the United States.

Another limitation was the exclusion of single African Americans and couples of same sex marriages. The exclusion of other ethnic population's limited key insight cross-culturally in terms of perceptions of dissatisfaction among various cultures that could give vital information across cultures that could be beneficial in extensive personality trait studies.

Another key limitation was the possibility of flawed responses on romantic self-reported interview questionnaires. Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh (2011) suggested that self-reports on adult relationships are ambiguous and that data can be limited to general references of relationships and not specific relationship experiences.

Another limitation was due to volunteers' consent to answer questions in an honest manner, which could lead to discrepant responses. Reduction of the above limitations was minimized by assuring that all of the volunteers understood the importance of completing all surveys and that honesty in their responses was required. Participants were given adequate pre-interview instructions and were provided assistance throughout the completion of the interview if they needed additional support to understand instructions.

Significance of the Study

This research provided more information about how to identify coping and personality traits that contribute to marital dissatisfaction and discord. As a result, couples will begin to implement new ways of coping with behavioral responses that formerly increased mate distress and overall relationship satisfaction.

This study may lead to positive social change. It is the primary hope of the researcher that participants gain renewed insight into ways their personalities and emotions can be understood, monitored, and positively lived out in a mutually harmonious interrelationship environment. Furthermore, this study aims to identify perceived imposed barriers to a person's self-concept and quality of mental health. The end result will promote a sense of positive social change through development of a healthy self-awareness and appreciation of others in relation to coping and living with difficult marriage interrelationships that contribute to unhealthy personal and mutual growth. This type of awareness will provide a step toward dismantling dysfunctional communication and relational happiness that will promote a broader appreciation of the individual and humanity within a global socio-cultural context.

This study will provide a framework for understanding the beliefs and emotional responses that contribute to issues of marital dissatisfaction and will identify potential coping strategies for addressing those issues.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the various ways African American married couples internalize and exhibit unpleasant emotions and marital dissatisfied behavior in mutual relationships. In addition, some individuals will form (as a result of exposure within these environments) socio-sexual dissatisfaction and various attachment styles and from these experiences, research will retrieve how individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors contribute to marital dissatisfaction. Results from this study will provide increased awareness for further research into developing behavioral

approaches to understand and address marital dissatisfied concerns and the perceptions behind such theme of thought.

In Chapter Two, the researcher will review relevant research literature and expand the conceptual framework. Through observation of couples' family attachment, socioeconomic factors, and coping styles in various settings, the literature examined will explore various perceptions associated with unpleasant emotions and how these views contribute to the development of dissatisfaction between African American married individuals. The literature will help alleviate current gaps in the practical application of theory in clinical practice. The therapy sessions will provide participants to think more critically about their own behavior and personalities that promote distress within their interrelationships. These sessions will also help participants become more proactive in decreasing systematic destructive patterns of negative emotions among their partners, which can lead to increased marital satisfaction and intimacy within the relationship.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this paper was to explore perceptions of marital dissatisfactions among African American couples and the emotional perceptions synonymous among African American couples that contribute to marital dissatisfaction.

In Chapter 2, I present a review and discussion of the perceptions of marital dissatisfaction among African American couples. I begin with an analysis of how attachment, socioeconomic factors, and coping styles contribute to forming dissatisfaction within marital interrelationships. The ways that people form attachments, cope, and respond to various socioeconomic factors determines what behavior will be expressed, so that a person's response is in direct proportion to his or her perceptual level of intensity or variable experiences encountered (Berenbaum, Bredemeier, Boden, Thompson, & Milanak, 2011).

I also considered literature on family attachment styles, coping history, and social attachments. I placed major emphasis on gathering literature pertaining to coping attachment responses in stressful environments and analyzing how external and internal influences contribute to the formation of dissatisfied behavior and marital distress.

Before exploring current data on African Americans, it is necessary to discuss the current coping, attachment, and socioeconomic factors among the general population of African Americans that help explain the dissatisfaction issues among African American couple's marital relationships. This chapter is organized as follows: (a) family environment, (b) attachment styles, (c) history of learned behaviors, (d) socioeconomic

factors, (d) coping styles, (e) internal and external influences, (f) controlling personalities, and (g) emotional abuse.

My sourcing strategies were obtained through online scholarly journals at Walden University's resource library. Information was obtained from key title searches to include *African American*, *African American distress*, *African American dissatisfaction*, *African American emotions*, *African American learned behavior*, *African American heritage*, *emotional dissatisfaction*, *cultural distress*, *cultural dissatisfaction*, *marriage satisfaction*, *slavery and marriage*, *African American divorce*, *African American abuse*, *African American control*, *African American depression*, *depression*, *African American attachment*, *African American coping*, *African American poverty*, *African American perception*, *African American phenomenological*, *African American experience*, *African American family*, *individual*, *interpersonal coping and attachment styles*, and *African American socioeconomic factors*. I used *Psycinfo*, and *SocIndex* database and used key words such as *African American*, *African American distress*, *African American marriage distress*, *African American emotions*, *African American learned behavior*, *African American heritage*, *emotional distress*, *African American emotional abuse*, *emotional distress*, *emotional dissatisfaction*, *cultural distress*, *cultural dissatisfaction*, *marriage satisfaction*, *marriage dissatisfaction*, *African American slavery*, *White privilege*, *African American divorce*, *African American sexual abuse*, *controlling personalities*, *African American depression*, and *African American perception* to perform my key word searches.

The Family Environment

When examining contributing factors that alter behavior, one of the most vital aspects to consider, especially among African Americans, was the influence of family, in terms of the formation of emotional instability, family mood, and neurodevelopmental mood disorders derive from both inherited and environmental factors (Berenbaum et al., 2011).

Family influences such as attitudes and cultural perspectives can carry over into adulthood relationships. Factors such as security and validity of feelings received through former family relationships and intermarriage perspectives are large factors contributing to family solidarity. Other familial factors, such as perception surrounding feelings in regard to one's ethnicity, are established by one's prior social context. As children grow up they share experiences and circumstances with their parents. As a result, children's behavior in later life can be viewed as an extension of their parents' behaviors transferred onto successive generations. Not only do parents contribute to their children through transference of various behavior patterns and ways they act, but most behaviors that parents transfer come from the parent's pre-adult years. Within various cultural environments, behaviors are transferrable. For instance, behaviors of children raised among various socioeconomic factors are altered by prior modeled behavior within specific social contexts. Parents who are highly educated usually seek to expose themselves and their families to people of similar educational aspirations. These customs are direct results of interfamily transference of cultural perceptions, which transform individual beliefs (Huijnk & Liefbroer, 2012).

The ideology of the family is a cultural schema of interrelated ideas and thoughts. Family schemas shape the belief system of the way people interpret how a family appears. A family's belief is defined as belief in the capacity of the family to work together to promote each member's growth and welfare (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Regalia, & Scabini, 2011).

Such shaping has historical roots in the African American view of the patriarchal family. Wade and Rochlen (2013) stated that the view of patriarchal marriage as a stable model of the man as the breadwinner with the women in a role of subservience does not work for the African American male. This rejection has historical ramifications synonymous with African American rejection of access within the American enterprise system, and it has deeper roots in the rejection of the European patriarchal marital role of the husband. The reality of slavery and its emasculation of the African American male negatively affect's males who never feel they can measure up to the European patriarchal breadwinner model. The experience of slavery was an issue of emasculation of the African American male's patriarchal manhood. This experience contributed to African American males' perceptions of the White patriarchal model as irrelevant to family life. European male gender roles conflict with African American males' views of their own masculinity, especially in tandem with the discrimination and racial oppression that they encounter from White European males.

Slavery and enslavement taught African Americans that their view of the institution of marriage was not necessarily the central core of love, mutual sexuality, and family life. This is especially true among African American females who were mostly

enslaved and forced to make decisions in the best interest of survival of the family. Hill (2006) noted that making such decisions often meant rejecting marriage for the sake of salvaging the family union. Over the years, the European patriarchal families will to survive, at the expense of relegating subpar matriarchal positions of African American women during slavery, has contributed to a significant reduction of acceptance of marriage as a two-parent union among some African American women and men. African American perceptions and external judgments of marriage have created several unpleasant emotions and behaviors.

Exhibiting unpleasant emotions and perceptions is one behavioral expression that can be mistaken as dissatisfaction during early adolescence and later adult life. Mothers and fathers tend to show more affection to a child with a joyful or affectionate personality and in families where the father showed more unpleasant emotions, the association between the mother's joy and child's affection was weaker (Barry & Kochanska, 2010).

Some couples seek resolve in becoming more extroverted in their interrelationships as a way to cure unpleasant emotions and obtain some form of satisfaction. Marriages with more extravert personalities produce greater likelihood of marriage satisfaction; however, the main contributing factors to higher mate satisfaction were greater similarities between mate differences and dissatisfaction not extroversive behavior. True satisfaction results are not based on whether either mate is extroversive or introversive (O'Rourke, Claxton, Chou, Smith, & Hadjistavropoulos, 2011). This seemed to suggest high similarities of satisfaction are associated with mutual similarities in differences rather than extroversive personalities.

There is limited empirical and theory-driven research in the area of attachment styles and how they contribute to emotional dissatisfaction. Research tends to be inconclusive and difficult to find. Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, and Larsen-Rife (2011) indicated fundamental limitations inherent in data regarding family attachments and forms of psychological treatment, particularly among romantic attachments. Although information on the important influence parents have on the early formation of a child's attachment patterns is present, it is hard to find data on parental influence on romantic attachment methods. In addition, a gap exists in literature on attachment issues and how they contribute to marital dissatisfaction among African American marital relationships.

Limited data have more to do with the inconsistent way people attach within changing environments and the unpleasant impulses exhibited as a response to them. Attachment styles are a by-product of an individual's previous and present interpersonal circumstances. Most adult attachment behavior consists of our anxiousness fear of being abandoned and the discomfort couples feel as a result of a lack of closeness (Benson, Sevier, & Christensen, 2013). Attachments accommodate and assimilate in various new ways over time.

Attachment Styles

Attachments originate from emotional exchanges between the child and the parent. As the child develops overtime, repeated exposure to parents emotional exchanges are internalized within the child. These internalizations are exhibited from the child through formation of attachment styles through expectancies, self-concepts, and

beliefs of others. Four types of dominant personalities contribute to formation of attachments. These four types of dominant personalities are secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful avoidance. *Secure attachments* are individuals who portray a sense of personal self-confidence and a strong sense of self-worth and worth of others. *Preoccupied attachments* are individuals who have a high positive perception of others and a low sense of self. These types of people have an exaggerated sense of needing others and a high anxiety of dependence. They are preoccupied with worrying about how important people in their life fail to care about them. *Dismissive attachments* have a positive self-perception but a negative view of others. They tend to have high self-esteem and low anxiety. They tend to disregard the significance of relationships and find it difficult to trust others. Those with *fearful avoidance attachment* view themselves and others in derogatory ways. They have high anxiety and avoidance levels. These individuals desire to be in a relationship, but avoid them because of their fear of rejection. They believe their rejection is synonymous with their feelings of unworthiness to be loved and the lack of desire for others to provide them with it (Fiori, Consedine, & Magai, 2009). These four types of personalities all contribute to African American personalities and behaviors within the context of interpersonal relationships.

Secure attachments, in terms of relationship satisfaction, describe individuals in secure attached relationships and find their overall relationship satisfying in themselves and others Ehrenberg et al. (2012). A person with a secure attachment personality has a high sense of self-worth and a comfortable level of closeness to other people. This ideal of secure attachment and closeness takes time. In terms of relationships, romantic

partners first visualize their partners for proximity, a safe haven, then as a secure base of attachment, which only occurs after 2 years of being in a committed relationship with that person (Fagundes, & Schindler, 2012).

Preoccupied attachments are common in the African American relationship experience. African Americans have a low sense of self and a high view of others. This is particularly true for African American young males who are peer pressured to conform to certain behaviors which include being tough and athletic, not participating in school, and being consumed by their physical appearance (Roberts-Douglass & Curtis-Boles, 2013). Preoccupied attachments are realized realities among many African American couples and their interrelationships. There is a direct correlation between avoidance and the way individuals view their environment and treat themselves. In Stagnor's (2001) experiment, he suggested if one provides information about other's long held beliefs of African Americans, this would produce change in the way African Americans were socially perceived. As a result, this would produce stronger beliefs over time within the in-group consensus, and resistance to change among participants when consensus supported their own stereotype beliefs. This research hypothesizes within environments where participants have a low self-concept and high collective public appeal people will be more likely to change their perception after being exposed to the majority external opinions. Individuals enter into relationships with long standing perceptions and assumptions learned over time about specific groups of people and these beliefs can permeate through time and be seen as truths. In the context of relationship and emotions,

it is what people think and feel and what they believe that is the major force behind preoccupied attachments (Rahimi & Strube, 2007).

Dismissive attachments are found to be more prevalent among older African American people. In a study performed among 800 African American and European White Americans adults, 75% of the group was classified as dismissive avoidance and only 21% were secure. Additionally, those between the ages of 65 to 86 were 22-30% avoidant and 55-61% secure. The results suggested that those between the ages of 18 to 66 had anxious attachments that were more intrinsically relative. Men and women between the ages of 15 to 87 showed that dismissive and secure attachment increased among those who were older while preoccupied attachments declined. Dismissive attachments prevail as a prominent attachment style, specifically because of African Americans encounters with racism, prejudice, and acculturation issues. African American children showed more dismissive behavior than European Americans, and between the ages of 15 to 54 were more likely to express avoidant and anxious attachment behavior (Fiori, Consedine, and Magai, 2009).

Fearful avoidance attachments are representative of a low sense of self and others. Among African American youth this avoidance style is seen through encounters with systemic stereotypes, which prompts the fear of being judged either as under-educated or non-intellectual. This fearful experience has caused youth to not perform as well within academic environments in relation to their White counterparts and to formulate a sense of nihilism in response to the anti-intellectual images of African Americans through social media venues (Kelly, Maynigo, Wesley, & Durham, 2013).

Insecure attachment patterns from parents during childhood increase the likelihood of these insecure behaviors on the adult child's offspring; secure attached relationships decrease the likelihood of such transference. Attachment-figure transfers occur during the course of personal development between childhood and adulthood (Zhang, Chan, & Teng, 2011).

Fearful avoidant attachments among White predominant cultures can produce several problems with how Black couples view their relationship with Whites and how they view themselves. Such self-hatred and hatred of others can lead to forms of rejection and personal attacks. Flaskerud (2011) stated Blacks have seen historical evidence of such hatred, rejection, and personal attacks through their confinement to reservations, ghettos, slavery, and systematic slaughters of characterizing their clothing and physical features as derogatory. Expressed anger and frustration toward other Blacks reinforce the reality of the traumatic effects of racism and class oppression most African Americans sense as daily realities. African Americans must begin anew to value themselves and ensure our families become strong. Without this, African Americans cannot expect to be well-functioning individuals.

Attachment and parental influences have a major influence on sibling behavior as well. Parental attachments are defined when a person experiences or perceives threat. This then activates the attachment system, which causes a person to perceive the absence or presence of a secure attachment figure. If an individual perceives that a secure figure is present over time, an individual forms anxious and avoidant strategies in response to the absence or presence of the secure figure. Parental figures are mainly responsible for

shaping attachment perceptions. Furthermore, an individual's attachment perception during infancy is predictive of the emotional quality the individual will exhibit in adult relationships (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2011).

The way people perceive attachments contributes to the level of distress or solidarity within their relationship. Mental perceptions are formed from prior individual experiences and the level of closeness to others. These views contribute to future ways people respond to others whom they perceive they are close or distant from. Married couples react differently within the attachment process as a result of their commitment to their partner. Attachment insecurities have greater association with personality traits that are synonymous with attachment and infidelity issues. People who are dating carry on with the idea or act of infidelity to avoid commitment, whereas married couples feign infidelity to increase the intimate relationship with the marriage partner. Attachment therapies, such as family therapy and focus group intervention, along with being responsive to partner's attachment concerns, are vital ways to reduce marriage attachment infidelity and distress (Russell, Baker, & McNulty, 2013).

Individuals in marriages are subjected to internal and external influences that alter personalities in various ways. Behavior can be activated at any time in response to a sense of threat. When this happens, individuals immediately turn to others for a sense of support regardless of the presence of internal strength. These threats ignite attachment responses as a result of past encounters from internal and external sources. Romantic relations are incubators for attachment relationships and intimacy, which are both triggers of perceived needs of attachments. In this way, intimacy and identity are formed as a

result of partnerships made in response to interactive and interrelated encounters. This inadvertently helps both couples increase their social and emotional awareness of themselves as a result of these internal and external interrelationship experiences. Context is one of the primary factors that alters peer interrelationships and major influence on how people cope and respond to various conflicting situations (Culow, 2007). All of these ways of coping result from peer experiences or social context.

Personality progressions have a large impact on human emotions and behavior. Most of our accumulated responses are direct results of encounters within environments that are destructive, aggressive, and antisocial. Hyperactive influences to these encounters are direct results of our internalized emotions. Our emotional influences originate from internalized fears, worries, psychosomatic symptoms, and influences that feed our depression (Slobodskaya, 2011). This kind of low self-image and distrust learned from family systems can lead to the formation of unhealthy perceptions of intimate relationships, especially among women.

One such example is the experience of an African American woman named Amereh Shabazz-Bridges (2011) who stated that growing up as a woman meant growing up without knowledge of herself and her body. As a result, this set her up to make bad decisions and many unhealthy choices. What she learned about sex as a child prompted her to use sex as a way to secure a husband. The message she heard learned from her parents was that if she wanted a husband she would have to have sex with him. Before marriage no one discussed sex with her, the use of condoms or other birth control measures. Amereh finds herself as a Black woman with multiple fathers of her children, a

survivor of sexual abuse and domestic violence, and someone with trust issues, and confusion about love and sex. African American women have the highest rate of children with different fathers. In addition, she stated her reason for having children from different fathers was the result of unprotected sex, and the hope that her life choices would end with more positive results. This case study demonstrates how our perceptions and distressed beliefs are transferred to us from culture and family systems.

Distress is inherited and learned from parent-child interrelationship experiences within the family system. Children learn interdependence and transfer these perceptions well into their adult years. For instance a child's secure attached feelings are in direct correlation with the proximity of the attachment figure, especially during times of distress. Comfort is conferred to the child from the presence of the attachment figure during times of difficulties, for early attachment is a large contributor to a child's socialization and moral behavior (Kok, van IJzendoorn, Linting, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Tharner, Luijk, and Tiemeier, 2013). As a result, the child reenacts the same behavior in future interactions with the parent. In contrast, family theorists Barry and Kochanska (2010) suggested that most parents who are distressed focus on the child's shortcomings as a distractive alternative to reduce marital tension. This is a critical issue among African American children because among abused children of all ethnic populations, African American children show less sympathy toward parents who abuse them (Patterson, 2006). Thus, in African American families with a history of post parental and child anger, marital satisfaction may be altered and transference could manifest in future parental-child relations and alter marital and family harmony.

History of Learned Behaviors

In terms of marital dissatisfaction, satisfaction decreases over time in relationships. Women and men seem to express greater levels of discomfort and less positivity in disagreeable environments. Partner support and warmth and maintaining low conflict environments had a stronger correlation to marital satisfaction among African American couples than European American couples (Cutrona, Russell, Burzette, Wesner, & Bryant, 2011).

Prior marital conflicts among parents also negatively alter their children's social development. Parental history of exposing children to hostile and negative environments stands as the most significant contributing factor of psychopathological development among their offspring. A parent's frightening experience toward a child can undermine their social emotional development and create barriers of adjustment difficulties well into adulthood (Dexter, Wong, Stacks, Beeghly, & Barnett, 2013). Since children adapt to and learn their behaviors from their parents, prior parental discord can cause their children to adapt negative interrelationships and low self-confidence. As a result, children form emotional insecurities that cause them to lack the skills to regulate their own emotions, form negative associations of their conflict with their sense of well-being, and have low self-efficacy in dealing with conflict situations. There is a direct correlation with the context African American children grew up in and the impact this has on their behavior (Sanchez, Lambert, & Cooley-Strickland, 2013).

Parental marital conflict affects boys and girls differently. Girls view marital distress in a more distressed way than boys and there are variations in the way each reacts

within the context of experiencing marriage conflict (Azam & Hanif, 2011). This is particularly true among African American adolescents who report more stressors and challenges than their White counterparts, which puts them at a greater risk of internalizing distress (Trask-Tate, Cunningham, & Lang-DeGrange, 2010).

Another form of negative attachment occurs when caregivers are hostile with their children, which can lead to carryover traits into adult relationships that contribute to relationship dissatisfaction. Expressions of criticism, verbal abuse, and humiliation from caregivers send a message to the child that they are not worthy, are scarred, are unlovable, and should serve the caregiver's needs only. Emotional abuse in this context is defined as a caregivers belittling, shaming, and rejecting a child. Emotional abuse can severely hamper a child's ability to learn and retain what they learn. Some forms of emotional abuse among children include verbal anger, rejection, emotional neglect, and psychological control (McCullough & Shaffer, 2014).

Control of one's emotions is a major factor within various interrelationship environments. The idea of emotional control describes the ability to control emotions between the individual and another person. This ability to regulate emotions in interrelationships is first experienced between the child and the emotional output from one's caregiver. If a child grows up in an environment that lacks emotional support, the child will struggle with issues surrounding social competence and decreased peer acceptance. Some children as a result of poor emotional caregiver history also have problems exhibiting both verbal and non-verbal communication within interpersonal relationship encounters, which can prevent later expressions of intimacy. Also, low self-

esteem is correlated to earlier parental and caregiver mistreatment. Formation of insecure ways of stating intense emotions, understanding one's own feelings, reluctance of getting involved in healthy relationships, and lack of desire or being comfortable with intimacy are all by-products of harmful caregiver adolescent emotional abuse (Kapeleris & Paivio, 2011). This viewpoint illustrates that disconnections within various situations can lead to formations of difficult emotional feelings.

When individuals disconnect from situations, this can lead to the formation of difficult emotional feelings. For instance, being emotionally disconnected can bring on feelings of emotional isolation within social settings. Attachment theorists McClure and Lydon (2014) suggested that these expectations are formed from early experiences, and that the way people are reared has a large influence on the expectations, intentions, ways of thinking, and actions in later life. These internalized ways of thinking assist individuals in the task of working through social information in a selfish and effective manner. Individuals who possess a self-serving manner tend to be less open minded. This openness refers to individuals not being able to comprehend and retain new ideas and revised inferences. The openness to new experiences would be an invaluable behavior for developing a new relationship, revealing new personal aspects of themselves to others, or adjusting typical behavior in response to others needs within mutual relationships. Openness to new information can be interpreted as the ability of people to change as a result of what they have learned or how they have distorted or ignored new information to assimilate into preexisting unchanged thoughts. The true sign that people are not able to make the adjustment to other differences and social information is an avoidant

personality. This personality resists openness from a personal motive of self-protection and self-preservation.

One of the major contributors to African American distress in relationships is the view of distrust of those who can help them. Nicolaidis (2010) stated that early during childhood African Americans are taught not to trust the White system of care. Part of the African American culture to not tell White people anything, inadvertently, causes African Americans to see the health care system as biased.

Socioeconomic Factors

Past experiences of lack of access, racism, and trauma increase perceptions and feelings of hopelessness among African Americans. African Americans are more likely to experience hopelessness, with males being more likely to suffer from this than females. Physical aggression develops early and persists longer among African Americans than any other ethnic class. Anger among African American females is a by-product of internalized feelings and emotional distress. As a result of these violent pasts, many African Americans suffer from adolescent depression. Exposure or involvement with violence during an early age, continue to be risk factors of hopelessness well into adult age (Stoddard, Henly, Sieving, & Bolland, 2011).

Low socioeconomic factors can contribute to marital and family dissatisfaction among African Americans. Families with fewer socioeconomic resources vary by race and ethnicity. White mothers generally have more access to economic resources, live in safer neighborhoods, and are more likely to have incomes above the poverty level than African American and Hispanic women. Arguably, socioeconomic factors and

differences are the largest factor of racial and ethnic differences in marriage and family stability (Hummer and Hamilton, 2010).

External stress among families is one of the most difficult environmental contributors to couple distress. Stress affects marriages in two ways. Stress related causes outside the marriage alternatively create stress within the marriage and reduces a person's ability to appropriately respond during times of stress. These stressors serve to shift couple's attention to a dissatisfied view of marriage that in turn hastens its disharmony. Marriage unfolds within several contexts, which test the durability of the relationship. Married couples that encounter more stressful events, indicate greater declines in marriage satisfaction (Neff & Broady, 2011). For instance, if a spouse is experiencing work place stress, at home the spouse may exhibit increased social isolation from the spouse and increasingly internalize their emotions. (Neff, 2012) stated that stress experiences negatively alter the way spouses respond and perceive negative events in the relationship. When a person is exhausted as a result of feeling disconnected and pressured, the ability to self-control is hard to maintain. If couples are distracted by stressful events in response to life events, their ability to cope is significantly reduced and their ability to respond to their spouse can be severely altered. Negative events associative with lack of financial resources and community components, are major contributors to marital dissatisfaction. In every study, African Americans are likely to have only the most fundamental of resources, have lower education and income, and are less likely to be employed than their White counterparts (Roxburgh, 2009).

African American's anger and unresolved emotions (such as racism and prejudice they experience from predominant Caucasians environments) have a huge influence on couple's level of interrelationship satisfaction. As a result of experiencing racism while living in predominant White environments, most Blacks prefer to live in parallel within predominant White environments, which inadvertently causes them to sense threats associated with their sense of well-being (Merz & Consedine, 2012). This can contribute to distress when self-ruling behavior permeates mutual relationships. Overall, trust develops over time. Seeking and providing security throughout life and securing these over our entire life experiences, influence ones trust in the world and those within it (Merz & Consedine, 2012). Interrelationship environments are places where these secure and insecure assumptions are lived out.

Another issue that leads to marital dissatisfaction among African American couples is coping resiliency during periods of traumatic, inconsistent challenges in relationships. Couples experience days when everything is positive and going well and other times when everything is negative and unbearably difficult. Research agrees that a couple's success depends on those within the relationship who limit negative events by forming new positive ways of coping and promoting positive ways of interacting. Most marriage success and positive outcomes depend on the context in which the marriage exists. The environment and context of the couple's relationship determines marriage success and satisfactory outcomes. Contexts such as increased stressful events, occupational related stress, sickness, and financial problems tend to place a strain on a couple's harmonic marriage union and context of the relationship (Neff, 2012).

Most judgments and decisions are susceptible to confirmation biases. These biases involve situation goals (X) and unresolved conflict (Y). The solution involves a focus on X (settled information) and reduction of Y (non-settled information). Confirming thoughts are obtained by focusing on X and reducing thoughts of Y (Kleiman & Hassin, 2013). The less time couples spend on things that are unsettled in their relationship, the more this will reduce unpleasant emotional experiences. When dealing with unsettled and unpleasant emotions, behaviors can surface that can prompt perceptions of marital satisfaction quality based on different x and y choices and different gender role x and y emotional conflict. Stanik & Bryant (2012) suggested that in terms of gender roles, African American women view their egalitarian role of work outside the home (more than European women) as a way of taking care of their families. Among African American men, this may have an association with their egalitarian view of synonymously seeing the role of a woman as both caregiver and breadwinner among some African American men who may feel they are breadwinners in more of a traditional role as provider. This may cause some disruptions in marital relationships in terms of difference of ideas of what typifies the correct family role. Most distressed marriages have higher levels of hostility when individuals give and receive less gender role support among each other (Miller, Mason, Canlas, Wang, Nelson, & Hart, 2013). Contexts such as stressful events, occupational related stress, sickness, and financial problems tend to place a strain on couples harmonic marriage union and context of the relationship (Neff, 2012).

Coping Styles

The three types of coping styles are contextual, socio-contextual, and individual difference coping styles, which occur within various contexts. Among African Americans, the environmental coping context has a direct correlation between what surrounds them and how they feel about themselves. One of the major contextual coping issues that contributes to African American dissatisfaction is the view and experience of distrust among White people. Racial discrimination can present daily challenges among African Americans families. A survey among African American adults revealed that 98% of African Americans in this sample report stated they experienced at least one racial event over the past year. Such experiences result in frustration, anxiety, and nihilistic expectation of a future discriminating encounter or racial experience (Brody, Chen, Kogan, Murry, Logan, & Luo, 2008).

One of the least researched socio-contextual coping styles that contributes to marriage dissolution is the powerful effect context has on altering peer norms and various ways of coping. Cheng and Mallinckrodt (2009) used the Sociocultural Attitudes toward Appearance Scale-2 (SATAQ-2) to determine how body image appraisals alter perceptions and behaviors. Results from this study revealed if parents took time within the context of the sibling relationship to maintain a close relationship with their siblings, this would reinforce a need among the children for environments of unconditional acceptance and thus provide the child with a buffer against the formation of negative views of personal acceptance.

The individual difference context form of coping in difficult family environments, is a major contributor to family disharmony and marital dissatisfaction. Hostile family environments have a direct correlation with contributing to marital difficulties (Wickrama, Bryant, & Wickrama, 2010). For instance, Neff (2012) showed that couples tend to forego forgiveness if the environment surrounding them is stressful, and spousal forgiveness is significantly reduced under stressful contexts. During a four-year period, couples' forgiveness gestures decreased during higher periods of stress. During times of higher marital stress from negative events within the marriage, couples tended to rely on dysfunctional styles of blaming spouses. In contrast, during low stressful periods, participants tended to forgive their partners. Couples are more positively engaged in relationships when daily relational events are positive and more negative during times where daily relationship events are less productive. While under stress, couples are more prone to interpret and respond in a negative manner in conflict situations.

Internal and External Influences

One of the major internal emotional indicators of inalterable external distress among African Americans is depression. Emotional distress is perceived and exhibited through a variety of different host(s) and bi-dimensional aspects. Men and women differ in their occurrence of moods and emotions. In the context of gender related symptoms, female depressive moods are more associated with thoughts they internally perceive, whereas males are more affected by external factors they encounter. Part of understanding African American depression is recognizing the context in which it occurs (Nicolaidis, Timmons, Thomas, Waters, Wahab, Mejia, & Mitchell, 2010).

In terms of internal and external coping, the presence of some traits can mean the absence of others. In terms of the irritableness within an unpleasant emotional episode, an association is drawn between the lack of agreement between internal fears and external perception. Instances of expressions of fear can be linked to periods of low extroversion and willingness to be open. Likewise, non-socialization is linked to externalization problems and personal perception is linked with internalizing problems (Slobodskaya, 2011).

In terms of developing a secure inner and outer self- perception, one's view of existence has an inherent base in one's self-perception and self-concept, because this is the precursor to having a healthy and secure personality. One's ethnic identity is paramount to a positive self-image. Having a strong view of one's ethnic identity has shown to have a positive association with a healthy self-concept, coping, and self-efficacy. Phinney (1992) directed a Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure that researched adolescent quantitative ethnic identity among adolescents. The study contained information from 547 Asian, African American, and Latino eighth to eleventh graders. Results showed levels of ethnic identity were significantly more prevalent among those in high school than middle school. The research associates stagnant identity to a lack of ethnic awareness. If a person is ethnically aware of who he or she is, then over time this matures into a sense of secure attachment and self-concept. As a result, developing an awareness of ethnic identity is a sealant against lower mental health functioning, promotion of high self-esteem, self-concept, and a general mastering of one's psychological well-being. Additionally, another study that sampled 91 high school

African American students found that those who considered themselves race-less (who identified themselves with European-American culture) were more prone to depression and other anxious pathologies (Greig, 2003).

Controlling Personalities

One of the major causes of marital dissatisfaction is the influence that powerful and controlling personalities have on marriage relationships. Humans become aware of human security and personal identity through dynamic interactions. Through the vehicle of human interaction, relationships have the power to transform and create power roles within interrelationships (Culow, 2007). This is why it is crucial to understand relationship inter-dynamics of power and control in order to better understand what contributing factors are inherent in controlled interrelationship environments. There are various forms of coping in response to controlling interrelationships. Interrelationship conflict is defined as definitive ways of resolving disagreements and barriers toward the goal of mutual attachment. A variety of pro-social ways of coping involve caring intentions for others, so that anti-social tendencies are viewed as harmful behaviors toward those in social environments. There are also forms of cultural coping and controlling. For instance, Asian cultures are more collectivist in nature, in that they place more emphasis on interdependence, in contrast to most western cultures, which place more emphasis on independence (Kato, 2013). In terms of parental coping, African American mothers use more psychological and behavioral control among girls and more validation and support among boys (Gaylord-Harden, Elmore, & Montes de Oca, 2013). Building an awareness of controlling personalities among various cultures and genders is

an asset especially in relation to controlling personalities among African American males and females, especially in light of the Super Black Women concept of control.

The image of the Super Black Women as someone in control of everything is one of the controlling power forces that lead to distress and couple disharmony. Most of this behavior can pose a problem in African American relationships if the African American wife portrays herself as a super woman. Historically, the Strong Black Women image came from a justification of slavery. African American females were seen as stronger physically and psychologically than White women in order to justify their servitude. This image received new life as a response to societal derogatory images of Black women over the centuries since slavery and recently among the media. Some of the symbols of The Strong Black Women are inherent strength, resiliency, and a strong self-will. The Strong Black Women is also seen as someone who can handle any challenge. As a result, a lot of stressors have developed as a result of individuals struggling to live up to this Super Women image. This idealistic and unrealistic view can be detrimental to the African American females coping efficacy and can bring more trauma and stress as a result of living up to such unrealistic standards. As a result, these women often have the inability to regulate emotional difficulties, which causes them to internalize their feelings and model a strong Black women facade (Harrington, Crowther, & Shipherd, 2010). These internalized responses can form unpleasant emotional traits that can wreak havoc within shared interrelationship environments. The image of the Strong Black Women is seen as a barrier in recognizing depression or reaching out to others to obtain care (Nicolaidis et al., 2010).

Emotional Abuse

Another form of coping struggles among African American couples stems from emotional abusive relationship encounters. Emotional abusive contributors of dissatisfied relationships are staggering and numerous. There are significant correlations between partner violence and self-esteem levels. A study on 100 women's sense of self and the damaging effects of poor interrelationships, focused on their response to open-ended survey questions. These questions asked about the way they viewed themselves, factors that contributed to their sense of self, and their own sense of change. Of these women, 51% had experienced psychological or physically abusive partners within the prior year, while 43% reported no partner subjecting them to psychological or physical abuse. All of the women reported positive self-references but women subjected to partner abuse reported more negative descriptions of themselves, derogatory views of self-change, and loss of self-concept. Partner violence contributes negatively to women's self-identity, ability to assess their needs, and self-efficacy. A woman will adapt ways that predict meeting her partner's needs so she can place her focus from herself to her partner in order to prevent future violence from her partner. When this change occurs, it reduces her ability to perceive her own needs and perspectives. This negative environment coupled with the critical comments from a violent partner, reduces a woman's self-esteem. This shift in focus from the victim to the violent partner contributes to the woman's loss of a sense of self and view of herself through the eyes of her violent partner. Partner violence has significant associations with a negative sense of self. Women tend to perceive a sense of self through processes of connected relationships that they experience over time, such

that when they experience angry partners in their relationships, this contributes to a loss of mutual empathy. Their partner's anger causes women distress, so that they begin to attempt to reconnect or alter the dynamic of the relationship (Lynch, 2013).

Struggles with sexual coping history are synonymous with factors that contribute to the formation of various unpleasant emotions that contribute to mate dissatisfaction. Research states that African American females are more prone than any other race to have high rates of sexual concurrent relationships (Grieb, Davey-Rothwell, & Latkin, 2012). Coping with historical sexual issues can alter future behavior over time, especially if the history involves negative experiences.

Apart from sexual abuse, sexual infidelity can also be an insurmountable problem from which to recover. Suffering from infidelity can result in the production of low self-esteem, faltering relationships, identity crisis, and can cause insurmountable pressure on a couple's relationship solidarity. Couples going through such trauma, as a result of a mutual experience may not be able to help the other partner cope because of their own feelings and need for assistance. In instances like these, even though blame is irrational, individuals find some sense of comfort in assuming some role in the loss rather than having no reasoning at all. During such stressful times, their normal ways of coping with stressful circumstances are extended past their ability to cope. As a result, issues can surface that can cause couples to have an increased breakdown in their communication and can lead to questioning the validity of why the relationship was started (Jaffe, & Diamond, 2011).

African Americans and Hispanics are less tolerant of cheating or infidelity in committed relationship than Caucasians. Fewer African Americans and Hispanics believe they are in committed relationships. Sexual promiscuity is seen as a severe form of infidelity in both the African American and Hispanic culture. Some of the answers that prompt people to cheat in a committed relationship were related to unfulfilled desires of excitement, fun in a secondary relationship, and sexual desire. Many of the studied individuals cheated so they could have something on the side to take up the lack of access that mainly exists in their current socioeconomic culture. This behavior can likely be traced back to paternal reactions within various stressful conditions. In addition, there are some similarities of sexual and cultural models of infidelity between African Americans and Hispanics. Common trends were the tendency to be economically and emotionally reliant on one's partner, an understanding that other relationships can exist for material resources or pleasure, some level of emotional commitment, and infidelity as a buffer to avoid confronting acceptable feelings and financial scarcity (Macauda, Erickson, Singer, and Santelices, 2011).

Among married couples, unresolved emotional stress contributes to anger and strained relationships. Studies have found links to stress and psychosocial functioning among African Americans (Hood, Brevard, Nguyen, & Belgrave, 2013). Emotions can also contribute to major problems in marital relationships. Early childhood and adult emotional environments are litmus tests and predictors of its marital quality, conflict, or satisfaction level. The emotions modeled by parents and experienced by children are vital influences on a child's human development and can significantly alter ways they perceive

quality interrelationships later in life. These behaviors form vital perceptions especially during the early years of a child's development. Attachment theorists believe that children send emotional signals to parents early on as a sign that they need care and security. In a developmental study of six to 12 month old developmentally disabled babies and their mothers, positive correlations were found between the maternal mother's sensitivity and infant's security (Seskin, Feliciano, Tippy, Yedloutschnig, Sossin, & Yasik, 2010). How parents respond to these signals is the main factor in the formation of how adolescent attachment is created within the child, which in turn can be an early predictor of future adult perceptions of attachment. Children use their parent's emotional responses to alter the parent-child environment and order the way they behave socially. The parent's response has a significant impact on how the child develops and orients attachments and on their socio-emotional development. This development extends far into their children's future way of coping, emotionally interpreting, and using criteria to establish quality relationships (Barry & Kochanska, 2010).

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter explored perceptions of marital dissatisfaction among distressed African American marriage couples. Though marriages are entered into with the intent of living happily ever after, various personality traits can surface that prevent relationships from having such an ending. While few studies have examined marital conflict among various populations, fewer still have utilized perceptions of dissatisfaction and distinguished these personality styles of conflict within the context of various family environments, attachment styles, history of learned behaviors, socioeconomic factors,

coping styles, internal and external influences, controlling personalities, and history of learned behavior and emotional abuse. Over 60% of variations in marital quality are a direct result of personality traits that exists between two couples (Fisher & McNulty, 2008).

This chapter emphasized that effective prevention of marriage dissatisfaction requires research that aids in developing healthy intimate relationships. Such research requires data that focus on contributing factors that decrease intimate and healthy relationships, such as developing an emotional competency to responses within negative environments (Kapeleris & Paivio, 2011). Furthermore, environmental influences of racism and prejudice were discussed in this chapter, as well as the heavy strain these influences have on African American relationships and marriages (Cowdery, Scarborough, Knudson-Martin, Seshadri, Lewis, & Mahoney, 2009).

There is no doubt that African Americans experience a unique set of circumstances when compared to other immigrants who came to America. Most researchers will agree that the various coping behaviors employed by African Americans in response to their circumstances are unique and directly impact their physical and psychological health as well as their relationships with others (Bridges, 2010). This chapter was an attempt to shed light on some of the differences that create dissatisfaction between married couples and their family life cycle. In regards to social change, great strides have been made to alleviate distress among our general population in terms of marital relationships however more research is needed to balance the scale of the African American experience, whose rate of single parent and divorce rates far exceed any other

ethnic group norm. Additionally, this study took advantage of various components to understand and explain how and to what extent, socioeconomic factors and coping and attachment styles exists within expressed and internalized partner dissatisfaction, with the goal of finding intervention strategies for reducing distressful encounters among African Americans marital interrelationships.

Chapter Three will present the research methods for gathering data on the perceptions of mate dissatisfaction and their possible remedy. This chapter will highlight the rationale for choosing a qualitative method approach to answer the research questions asked herein. Following, there will be a discussion on the research design, participant recruitment methods, instruments developed and used, ethics, data collection, data analysis and data security. The results of the study will be presented in a future chapter, and conclusions will be drawn based on the findings.

To this end, the search of the literature for this study was broad. It included library databases such as *PsychInfo* and *SocIndex*.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of marital dissatisfaction and how these contribute to forming dissatisfaction among African American married couples. This study provided an understanding of how couples thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are attributed to perceived marital dissatisfaction within various social and relational environments.

Every human has an innate desire to bond with an attachment figure for the sake of survival and protection (Martin, Vosvick, & Riggs, 2012). I explored literature and life experience questionnaires suggesting how coping, attachments, and socioeconomic factors contribute to perceptions of marriage dissatisfaction among African American couples 30 to 50 years of age.

In this chapter, I describe and detail the design of the study, instrumentation, population, sample size, ethical considerations, process of collecting and recording, data analysis, assumptions, limitations, and validity threats that were sources of errors.

Research Design and Methodology

Research Questions

RQ1. How do African American couples define their marriage?

RQ2. How do coping mechanism and attachment styles contribute to marital dissatisfaction?

RQ3. How do African American couples feel their socioeconomic experiences can influence their marriage?

Interview Questions

Part A. Define marriage dissatisfaction experiences.

RQ1. How do African American Couples define their marriage?

1. Tell me how you feel about your spouse?
2. Tell me about the thoughts your spouse has expressed about you?

Part B: Ascertain African American couples coping and attachment dissatisfaction experiences.

RQ2. How do coping mechanism and attachment styles contribute to marital dissatisfaction?

1. Tell me about how your marriage experiences contribute to your view of marriage?
2. Tell me about the things you and your mate communicate about often?
3. Tell me about the way your family and people you're around influences your current perception of what it means to have a satisfied marriage?
4. Tell me about some of the ways you and your spouse may see things differently?
5. Tell me about the way that you and your spouse interact with each other?

Part C: Ascertain African American married individual's socioeconomic and coping expressions of marriage dissatisfaction.

RQ3. How do coping mechanism and attachment styles contribute to marital dissatisfaction?

1. Tell me about your relationship history?

2. Tell me about how things around you influence your marriage?
3. Tell me about some of the memories you have about your marriage?
4. Tell me about how finances and a chance of upward mobility may influence your marriage relationship?

The objective of this chapter was to present rationale for this qualitative phenomenological studies research methodology, data collection, and analysis process. This dissertation used a qualitative study to identify perceptions of dissatisfaction through defining marital dissatisfaction, and to identify how the inability to resolve conflict, attachment and socioeconomic issues were perceived to form dissatisfaction among African American couples. Qualitative and phenomenological methods helped to identify perceptions of dissatisfaction by defining marital dissatisfaction, and how the inability to resolve conflict, attachment issues, and socioeconomic issues contributed to the formation of dissatisfaction among African American couples. These areas were researched through various case methods, in-depth interviews, and situational observations, to determine various ways married couples cope, attach, and respond within interpersonal relationships.

In this study, I explored the experiences and perceptions of married individuals through in-depth interviews, surveys, and observational small group discussions. I interviewed ten married individuals for similarities in their shared experiences, although only seven married individual responses were used as the criterion sample for this studies data and research. There are numerous arguments in support of determining the most appropriate sample size for research endeavors, though most scholars support the view of

saturation as the critical factor to consider in determining qualitative research sample size decisions. Saturation is defined as that point in which the data collection process no longer offers any new or relevant data (Dworkin, 2012). Various data was collected on ten couples (20 individuals) in case some of the data were corrupted. Demographic data were collected, such as sex, age, marital status, parental history, education, and socioeconomic-shared experience similarities. When recording perceptions about mates, particular attention was paid to coping, attachment, and socioeconomic factors and their contribution to marital dissatisfaction. Gaining an understanding of the phenomenon behind these perceptual tendencies among participants of this study helped to bring a substantive understanding of how coping, attachment, and socioeconomic factors contribute to marital dissatisfaction and mate distress within marriage interrelationships.

A phenomenological approach was deemed most appropriate because the aim of this study was to examine the lived experiences of the participants, and phenomenology allowed me to engage in the participants' subjective perception of lived experiences and revealed the significance of the phenomenon under study (Gee, Loewenthal, & Cayne, 2013). A chronological examination of participants' lives was outside the scope of this study, which meant that a biographical approach was not likely to be an effective strategy for assessing participants' perspectives. The case method approach was not appropriate for this study, because this research process was more effective for psychological analysis when it could be completed on a longitudinal basis, which would not enhance the outcomes of this research. For these reasons, the phenomenological approach was the preferred method of study for this dissertation.

A qualitative methodology was also deemed appropriate for this study. This methodology enabled exposure of various supporting hypotheses regarding marital dissatisfaction and personality traits, and fulfilled the objective of this particular study, namely to look closely at how coping, attachment, and socioeconomic factors contributed to the formation of dissatisfied perceptions among African American married couples and their view of the marriage union. A qualitative approach was used because of its emphasis on the examination of the human experience. It also offered an efficient method of gaining insight through an examination of social or human behavior, which was an effective way to facilitate qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). Through examining couples' lived experiences, qualitative research helped me to achieve a greater overall portrait of human existence and psychology (Guzman, 2011).

Creswell (2009) noted that qualitative framework for a phenomenological study is the best method available within qualitative analysis because it helps to link ideas of participants with the same phenomenological shared experiences, which was necessary for this study. Phenomenological study begins with a solid descriptor and ends with a systematic qualitative analysis of the meaning of the descriptor (Gee et al., 2013). Through analysis of the series of in-depth interviews with couples in a phenomenological manner, the overarching objective was to identify differences in the meaning of these themes with respect to perceptions of marital dissatisfaction from African American couples who reported concerns of dissatisfaction. Gaining an understanding of perception of dissatisfaction was of particular importance among African American couples because of their history of reluctance to discuss crisis they experience in marital relationships and

their history of ambivalence toward marriage (particularly among African American women) who viewed marriage as a loss of power and control (Emory & White, 2006).

Although it was possible to use a regression analysis for this study, this was less ideal because a regression required different data to be collected than a qualitative approach, and such terms were less appropriate to answer the research questions posed here. The questions of this study were best answered through interview questionnaires that resulted in qualitative not quantitative data. The aim of qualitative studies is to understand one's experience (Oluyori, 2013). Requiring such surveys to have continuous, numeric data, could have resulted in biases or incomplete answers.

Role of the Researcher

Within qualitative research participants' were foundational to this study, and informational outcomes were defined by the interpretation of the researcher (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the role of the researcher was to observe through in-depth interviews and interview questions, and as a result, to gather information to determine similarities between coping, attachment, and socioeconomic perceptions and dissatisfied emotions.

The researcher had no prior personal or professional relationship with participants of this study. The researcher was particularly well equipped to handle this study because research measuring experiences during in-depth interviews required a narrative sharing environment of information among participants within this interview setting (Githens, 2007). Over the years, the researcher witnessed clients struggling with difficult emotions such as anger, rage, and pessimistic viewpoints. These emotions limited couples' harmonious relationships and shattered future hope of mutual reconciliation among client

couples that failed to see past their current unpalatable situation. As a clinical counselor, the researcher learned that individuals can survive horrendous relationships by gaining an understanding of what true factors and personalities contribute to various views of dissatisfied perceptions. Through years of research and various academic inquiries, the researcher developed a passion for helping married couples identify and reframe discontented perceptions and formed an inner drive in developing skills to help equip couples with tools to enable greater mutual satisfaction. The personal and professional bias ethics of the researcher were protected through anonymous selection of the group of community participants who were gathered through third-party solicitations by outside professional contacts.

Methodology

The study used criterion sampling of seven adult married individuals of African American descent who have been married at least one year. A survey was also gathered for the purpose of selecting participants experiencing some form of marital dissatisfaction, which was noted on the volunteer survey material and consent form. Some of the criterion was relative to participants experiencing some form of coping, attachment, or socioeconomic factors, to determine what level of dissatisfaction within the relationship was due to emotional dissatisfaction and marital distress. The study engaged broad demographic variations outside of race and ethnicity. At the same time, there were limitations in defining individuals for this study based on their own identity rather than on defined ethnic and cultural specifications.

Participants were recruited through small community groups of African American married individuals desiring help with their family's quality of life. No clients of the researcher were included as a participant in this study. This was a new phenomenon to African American individuals who have a history of distrust of the mental health profession. Historical medical abuses similar to the Tuskegee Syphilis Study contribute to distrust among African Americans of the mental health system and associated with their unwillingness to participate in medical research (Russell, Robinson, Thompson, & Arriola, 2012). This can prevent participants from willing to perform research. All these factors of distrust and reluctance figured into why we chose to interview each participant individually, by respecting their cultural privacy and ethical considerations. The chosen seven individual participants, met with the researcher at individually prescheduled times at the South County Regional Library, a central location that was easily accessible by both public transportation and other means. The determinant of sample size in this qualitative studies was justified by interviewing participants until reaching the point of data saturation, which is the point where there was no new information to learn (Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles, & Grimshaw, 2010). For this study, I interviewed seven adult married individuals in a private room at South County Regional Library, and explored similarities in their shared experiences. However, I collected data on ten couples (20 individuals); just in case some of the data were corrupted. A small sample size does not necessarily make statistical results less significant (Lantz, 2013). Small sample sizes are key features of qualitative studies (Pearcey & Wilson, 2008). Historically, much of the foundational research, for instance that performed by

psychologist such as Freud, Piaget, and Skinner, was conducted with small sample sizes. Research based upon depth of the content of the experience should not be confused with research based upon sampling strategies. One could use five or twenty participants for that matter; in phenomenological and qualitative studies, how many is not a concern, because the meaning of the individuals experience is the impetus (Englander, 2012). Data was drawn from participant's sex, age, marital status, parental history, and socioeconomic shared experience similarities. Each personal interview with each participant was administered at the library in a private room.

There were several criteria for inclusion or exclusion in this study. To be included in this study one had to be an adult married for a minimum of one year and of African American descent. Exclusion criteria for the study included married individuals of same sex marriage and those who were not married or single. Participants who do not speak English as their first primary language were not included in the study.

Most of the volunteers who took part in the study were contacted to schedule an individual interview. Participants were told about the purpose of the study in advance and the interview questions were not shared. Confidentiality was stressed to maintain participant's privacy and protection. Each participant was given an appointment for his or her individual interview, each of which was scheduled during a one-hour period. The length of the interview was 45 minutes. Participants were given the information that a follow-up interview may be required in order to clarify any unclear information in the interview data so that mutual dialogue could occur. The process was the same for each individual interview, which all occurred at The South County Regional Library.

Data Analysis

As listed in APPENDIX (C) parts of this research required the usage of a tape recorder for the interviews of participants. Tape recordings were then submitted to a professional transcriptionist for transcribing each interview. Although first names were used in the interviews, this transcriptionist did not receive any personal data about participants, and signed a consent form to assure such confidentiality. Interview copies were presented back to the researcher in three forms: original digital recording, digital copy, and hard copy of the interview. Given the research methodology, only verbalized cues or comments were included as raw data in the recording and transcription, although field notes were taken at the time of the interviews in order to ensure that all non-verbalized information was also captured. Having each interview transcribed verbatim and keeping detailed notes helped to establish descriptive validity for this study. Confidentiality of all participants were maintained because the researcher was the only one who has access to the tapes and the transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement that all information would be handed over to the researcher and no copies of data were accessible to anyone except the researcher at the end of transcription. All tapes were destroyed after transcription in the presence of the researcher and transcriptionist.

Consent of participation was secured before collecting data through the interview survey questionnaire. Each participant involved in this study was alert, oriented, and gave permission to legally consent for participation.

As soon as the individual participant entered the interview room at the library, a code number was assigned to the demographic and interview questionnaire sheet (see Appendix A and Appendix B) that helped to facilitate the research process.

To determine interpretative validity and ensure triangulation of the data, participant confirmed the interview notes once they were transcribed. This helped the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants lived experiences and their perceptions regarding their therapists' lack of cultural awareness.

Transcripts were examined through a phenomenological framework. Data analysis of this research included a few distinct steps. These included: (a) reading the descriptions, (b) delineating meaning units, (c) organizing the meaning units, (d) seeing the meaning units psychologically, (e) situating structural descriptions, (f) identifying general themes, and (g) constructing a general situated structure (Robbins & Parlavecchio, 2006). This provided for greater textual clarity in relation to each interview and higher quality of participants verbatim responses from the transcribed interview sessions. From this, a composite structural description and major themes were developed, drawing from the meanings and essences of the experience and representing the participant group as a whole.

The interview survey questionnaire consisted of three survey questions. The in-depth semi-instructed interview questions and gathering of data were analyzed by the researcher to significantly reduce injection of any cultural and personal biases in relation to data interpretation and results.

The primary instruments for this study were eleven types of semi-structured interview questions that were created exclusively for this research process. These eleven semi-structured questions were asked in order to begin the conversation, and additional questions asked if necessary to clarify participant responses or prompt spontaneous responding. Qualitative interview data contained participants' experiences, opinions, feelings, and personal information. In a phenomenological study, the participants must be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences (Creswell, 2009). The semi-structured interviews produced first-person, expert, natural data from participants who had an ability to provide information on their lived experiences within emotional dissatisfied marital relationships. The demographic and interview questionnaire (see Appendix A and Appendix B) included gender, marital status, age, race, religious affiliation, education level, and family size.

Along with the eleven research questions, this study examined two theoretical foundations that viewed various theories of learning personality and emotions under distressful conditions. The purpose for these theories helped gain an understanding of couples coping, attachment, and socioeconomic styles response under dissatisfied conditions, and how these contributed to emotional dissatisfaction in marriage interrelationships.

Data analysis was obtained through self-directed in-depth interview questions, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. The in-depth interview questions, content validity, and gathering of data were analyzed by the researcher to significantly reduce injection of any cultural and personal biases in relation to data interpretation and results.

Before starting, the researcher made sure the research was in compliance with The American Psychological Association (APA) and Walden University IRB department. Demographic Information and interview questions were collected post-interview from each individual participant at their private individual interview session in the reserved private room at the South County Regional Library, a central location that was easily accessible by both public transportation and other means. The researcher recorded data on prepared interview sheets for each survey collected post-interview. Interview results were then analyzed by the researcher for data analysis and recording of results. Given the research methodology, only verbalized cues or comments were included as raw data in the recording and transcription, although field notes were taken at the time of the interviews in order to ensure that all non-verbalized information was also captured. Having each interview transcribed verbatim and keeping detailed notes helped to establish descriptive validity. The researcher had a post-interview meeting with participants after the total collection of data for a summary of research project. The researcher connected data to specific research question through in-depth semi-structured interview questions (inherent in phenomenological studies) and the gathered data were analyzed to significantly reduce injection of any cultural and personal biases in relation to data interpretation and results. Phenomenological methods of study place critical generalizations onto results not participants; the resultant data was not limited by participant's experiences, but suspended pre-knowledge and generalities, in order to discover new generalizations and information of the phenomenon of study (Englander, 2012).

The researcher assigned each participant a numerical code for each individual's demographic and interview questionnaire sheet (see Appendix A and Appendix B) and assigned numbers one through seven (men even numbered two, four, six and women odd numbered one, three, and five) to help identify each interviewee responses on the interview sheets. The researcher was the only one privy to interview results and information, as there was decoding of data and listing perception similarities relative to participant responses to the demographic and interview questions that asked questions relative to lived experience and three major research questions.

The phenomenological method of study and interview questions (see Appendix B) increased credibility of the data results, which is a characteristic of phenomenological studies. Phenomenological study is interested in understanding the meaning of the participants' lived experience throughout the state of the analysis (Gee et al., 2013).

After data was collected, transferability of data was limited based on the age, perception, and demographic of participants involved. Group responses from different demographics were not equivalent groups from the same population (Dorans & Middleton, 2012). Dependability was maintained and reinforced through the nature of the participant's marital distress shared between each individual and the nature and context of the study of coping, attachment, and socioeconomic perceptual responses to marital distress. The interpretation attached to the relationship between linked scores depended on the similarities shared among the interviewed participants and the conditions that provided the context for the assessment (Dorans et.al; 2012). The shared and varied method within phenomenological studies emphasis of one's lived experience and the

context of in-depth interviews context within this survey allowed participants to share perceptions of distress and narrative information which were emotional, performative and personal aspects of speech inherent in reflexive contexts (Elliott, Ryan, & Hollway, 2012).

After collection of the data, intra and inter coder reliability was maintained through the researcher's data analysis process of identifying themes, organizing meaning units from data results, structural descriptions, seeing the meaning units in psychological terms as they related to the overall theme of exploration of perceptions of marital distress among African American couples and the study's demographic population.

Before accessing any data or implementing any public survey, the researcher first obtained volunteer permission of participants and Walden Universities IRB board. Human rights of participants were maintained with regard to providing all participants (a) informed consent (b) protection from harm, and (c) consent to privacy. Consent forms helped ensure that participant's information would remain anonymous and confidential. No one but the researcher had access to the survey information and tape-recorded interviews. For data reporting purposes, each participant was identified by a number one through seven, with men representing even numbers two, four, six and women odd numbers one, three, five, and seven respectively. This number did not correspond to any special significance or place within the interview process. Ethical principles were followed for compliance in an ethical manner

The researcher gave careful consideration to assure that steps were taken to protect the identity and integrity of volunteer participants and procedures throughout the

process of future data collection. All information received from participants was replaced and assigned with a code that was only known to researcher and kept in a locked cabinet at his home. The Informed Consent and Interview Questionnaire (Appendix B) was developed to include every possible issue relative to the study population and surveys. Confidentiality, voluntary participation, researcher and chairs contact information, and option to withdrawal from participation, were provided at the time of the interview.

Before beginning any data collection or interview of participants, Walden Universities Internal Review Board (IRB) permission was obtained after chair approval of researcher's dissertation proposal section.

The interview responses and data results helped the researcher gain insight into patterns within the data, and develop a working knowledge of the phenomenology within this research study. Various themes surfaced and were examined for further interpretation and analysis of meaning. The final stage of examination involved the synthesis of all information so that solid explanations of observed themes were formed. Once the themes were solved, then final conclusions were drawn in regard to the data and its meaning. All final conclusions will be shared and available for future scholarly research comparative questions and future recommendations for usage in clinical training.

Summary

This chapter outlined approaches of the methodology process and the types of data that were obtained. This research was used to discover how coping, attachment, and socioeconomic issues contributed to marital dissatisfaction and allowed all participants an opportunity to express themselves through the phenomenological research experience. A

qualitative phenomenological interview framework was determined to be the most appropriate method of examining personality in conjunction with expressed behavioral dissatisfaction among married couples.

It is important to note that this researcher adhered to all ethical standards of Walden University, as well as those of both the American Psychological Association and the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists. The considerations behind the sample of the chosen population, the data collection and analysis procedures, the study's use of instrumentation and its credibility, authenticity, and fairness were also described in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Prior to this study, to my knowledge, no research had been conducted to examine variances in socio-economic factors, attachment, and coping styles and the lived experience of marriage dissatisfaction among African American couples. This study was based on a qualitative research design and addressed critical gaps in literature toward understanding attachment, coping, and socioeconomic experiences within the fabric of perceived marriage dissatisfaction among African Americans as a result of encounters with these factors. Lebow, Chamber, Christensen and Johnson (2012) stated that marital distress has a strong association with various levels of mental and physical psychopathologies.

The general problem centers on limited research available to help understand these lived experiences with such factors such as attachment, coping, and socioeconomic influences within African American marriage interrelationships. Current research was needed in order to further our understanding of these variables and their lived experiences. Gaining an understanding of these variables and their perceived marriage dissatisfaction experiences, will help couples identify and adapt future positive responses to reduce such experiences. We need more research to help African Americans reduce their increasing rates of relationship dissolutions (Cutrona, Russell, Burzette, Wesner, & Bryant, 2011).

Hence, this research will fill a gap in understanding the underlying attachment, coping, and socioeconomic factors that contribute to perceptions of marital

dissatisfaction. Although research defines sociological contributors as the initiator of this problem, it has failed to provide sound psychological and interpersonal data in relation to their experience and its relationship to low marriage rates among African American couples (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). This problem is essential within the field and study of psychology and can lend sufficient evidence and increased understanding of how emotional thoughts and behaviors correlate within traumatic lived experiences. Most emotional expressions are progressive cognitive actions from the told stories of a person's emotions (Greenberg, 2012). These told emotional stories derive from prior family emotional expressions among their children; which inherently influence the perceived emotional norm their children portray. The act of one family member affects the actions of another family member (Garrett-Peters, Mills-Koonce, Zerwas, & Vernon-Feagans, 2011).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore perceptions of dissatisfaction among African American couples who are experiencing coping, attachment, and socio-economic issues. An understanding of perceptions will lead to greater awareness of issues relative to African American couples within difficult coping, attachment, and socio-economic interrelationships. Research is vital for the substantial numbers of African American couples experiencing such dissolution in their relationships with coping, attachment, and socio-economic factors. Research on this subject is very limited within the field of psychological and social sciences. Individuals working within the social science field could truly benefit from gaining a greater understanding of these perceptions of dissatisfaction as it relates to lived out experiences. Research relative to factors that

contribute to marriage solidity and satisfaction among African American couples are difficult to find. Research is needed to help identify factors that reduce marriage stability and to establish new methods to avoid such separations. Some of the major contributors to African American marriage dissatisfaction involve difficulty coping with stressful events, adaptive ways couples attach within relationships, and lived experiences in low socioeconomic environments (Cutrona, Russell, Burzette, Wesner, & Bryant, 2011).

The results of this study did coincide with the participant's marital dissatisfaction experiences. The information obtained was useful in expanding what is known about differences between attachment, coping, and socioeconomic factors and perception of marital dissatisfaction among African American couples. This study addressed the following three questions: How do African American couples define their marriage? How do coping mechanism and attachment styles contribute to marital dissatisfaction? How do African American couples feel their socioeconomic experiences can influence their marriage?

Setting

Participants seemed hesitant in participating in this research project for reasons relevant to disclosure of issues surrounding their current level of marital dissatisfaction with their mate and whether the information would expose their identity.

Scheduling personal private interviews with all participants was quite challenging. Most of the adult participants in this study were involved in weekday and weekend extracurricular activities with their children or working more than one job to pay their bills. People spend a lot of time as caregivers or provide the bulk of financial support for

the family. One of today's major concerns for individuals and families is the difficulty of balancing work and family roles (Jansen, Mohren, van Amelsvoort, Janssen, & Kant, 2010).

Demographics

Participants comprised of seven African American married individuals (four women and three men) who expressed a desire to be a volunteer participant for this study. The age of African American female participants ranged between 32-50 years. The age of African American male participants ranged between 32-55 years. All individual participants reported being married at the time of the interview. All individual participants reported an average age at marriage between 31-40 years of age. Individuals between the ages of 46-50 reported a household annual income between \$30,000 to \$150,000. Half of the female participants reported their parents being married before they were born. Two out of three participants (between the age of 46-50) reported their parents being married when they were between birth to 5 years of age, and one out of three participants (between 32-36 years of age) reported their parents being married when they were between 6-10 years old. Individuals between the age of 46-55 and 37-41, reported parents being divorced, and among male and females, two of four individuals between the age of 46-55 reports parents obtaining a divorce when they were 18 and older, with (1 of 4) females between the age of 37-41 reported parent's divorce occurring between 11-15 years of age. Two males and females (between the age of 46-50) reported parents remaining married and both (male and female married individuals) ranging between 32-36 years of age, report parents remained married.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

ID #	Age	Marital status	Age married	Parents marital status	Income
1	49	Married	46	Divorced	Around \$100,000
2	52	Married	49	My parents are both deceased, and they died, my mother was a widow. (Married?)	Together, about 100K
3	48	Married	32	Married	60plus?
4	46	Married	30, 31, 32.	Married	About \$35,000 to \$37,000 a year
5	36	Married	33	Married	I think I would say around 75, 75,000.
6	36	Married	33	Married	Together, we're about 75/80,000. Somewhere in that range.
7	39	Married	32	Divorced (was 14)	Let me see if I can give you a rough estimate...our household income has reduced greatly. 50,000 combined.

Data Collection

The study involved seven participants, four women and three men. There were four individual females; two females between 46-50 years of age, one female between 37-41, and one female between 32-36 respectively. There were three individual male participants ranging in age from 51-55, 46-50, and 32-36 years of age.

Research was implemented at the South Country Regional Library in Charlotte, North Carolina as this was believed to be the most convenient location to host separate individual interviews and have everyone at the same place to assure appointment time and place consistencies of each individual interview session. Participants were given demographic and personal survey sheets to fill out prior to a private individual survey to assure identity validity and reduce the possibility of plagiarism. Demographic information included subject's age, years of marriage, and inquiry of current health (see Appendix A for the sample demographic sheet). After the demographic information was filled out by each individual participant, a table was created in a Microsoft Access software program, which can be viewed in Appendix A.

Forty-five minutes were allotted for the survey and the interview session was tape-recorded on a digital I-phone recorder. Researcher had a back-up 90-minute audio cassette tape (180 minutes for the total of both sides of the audio cassette) as to prevent malfunction problems with digital recording. The researcher had two tape recorders, batteries for the equipment (in the event that the electrical unit fails), and 20 cassette tapes to reduce the chance of having non-workable equipment, although one tape recorder was to be used for the study. The surveys were all reproduced with permission

of the copyright owner. Any other reproduction of tapes from anyone other than the researcher was prohibited. The interviews lasted about 45 minutes; the researcher allowed an additional 15 minutes after the interview for post-survey debriefing. The feedback given during debriefing allowed the participants to clarify of purpose for the survey, express any post-survey concerns or issues, and it permitted the researcher to journal any relevant information concerning each interview session. The total survey session lasted approximately between 45-55 minutes.

Categories were devised and created to report the data collected from the individual participant's interview questions (see appendix B). The questions were established to help guide the participants to report from first-person lived marriage experiences within various coping, attachment, and socioeconomic settings perceived as marriage dissatisfaction. The researcher created subcategories for each topic discussed and tables were created to report the self-reported interview responses. The following is a categorical outline that is discussed in this chapter: (a) ascertain level of dissatisfaction, (b) ascertain how African American couples define marital dissatisfaction, (c) ascertain level of socioeconomic and cultural factors and dissatisfaction.

The 11 interview questions are located under each category. These questions were developed by the researcher in an effort to gain first-person experiences of the participant's perception of marital dissatisfaction. The data were reported by using themes from self-reported comments, descriptive phrases, and analyzed summaries of the interviewee's responses. After various themes were identified, the researcher created

another set of themes to identify patterns of the data that were similar in comparison. Full transcripts of the research interviews are located in Appendix C.

Scheduling posed problems at first. The researcher found it challenging to get individual participants to agree on a mutual agreeable time to meet that did not compete with participants' work and family household conflicts and obligations. Research revealed that among married couples, work hour decisions must be made within the context of the household as a whole rather than individual consent (Jansen, Mohren, van Amelsvoort, Janssen, & Kant, 2010).

Data Analysis

The report process was accomplished by recording interviewees' responses to 11 questions coded into the following 13 categories. The 13 categories were devised to report the data collected from individual participants of this study. The 11 interview questions (see Appendix B) created for this qualitative study guided the participants to report their perceptions of marriage dissatisfaction as well as their lived experiences. The transcription process enabled the researcher to organize the data as well as identify particular common threads of information among the data results. The transcription process involved going through the answers for each participant and taking out the main ideas that fit into the categories and themes (based on the similarities that came up). The researcher focused on the main ideas and the most important points that were discussed in the interviews and also kept in mind the similarities between interviews. The researcher created three themes as subcategories for each 13 categories discussed, and tables were created to report the self-reported interviews. The following outlines each category that

is discussed in this chapter: (a) definition of marital dissatisfaction, (b) feeling towards spouse, (c) thoughts spouse expressed toward you, (d) marriage experiences, (e) subjects communicated about often, (f) family and those around who might influence perceptions of satisfied marriage, (g) seeing things differently, (h) interaction with each other, (i) relationship history, (j) other possible factors influencing marriage, (k) memories of marriage, (l) chance at upward mobility, (m) advice for couples.

The interview questions are also located under each category. In order to provide the best interview context to explore and include various discrepancies among participant responses to the analysis, self-directed interview questions were developed by the researcher in an effort to help individual participants explore and reflect on their life experiences of marriage dissatisfaction. The data were reported by using descriptive phrases, analytic summaries, and/or themes from self-reported interviewee's comments. After patterns of data were identified, the researcher created another set of themes to identify patterns of the data that were similar in expression. Full transcripts of the interviews are located in Appendix C.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

After data was collected, the transferability of data was limited based on age, perception, and demographics of participants involved. Group responses from different demographics are not equivalent groups from the same population (Dorans & Middleton, 2012). Dependability was maintained and reinforced through the nature of the participant's marital distress shared between each individual participant and the nature and context of the study of coping, attachment, and socioeconomic perceptual responses

to marital distress. The interpretation attached to the relationship between linked scores, were dependent upon the similarities shared among the interviewed participants and the conditions that provided the context for the assessment (Dorans et.al; 2012). The shared and varied method within phenomenological studies emphasizes one's lived experience and the context of in-depth interviews context within this survey allowed participants to share perceptions of distress and narrative information, which were emotional, performative, and personal aspects of speech inherent in reflexive contexts (Elliott, Ryan, & Hollway, 2012).

After collection of the data, intra and inter coder reliability was maintained through the researcher's data analysis process that identified themes, organized meaning units from data results and structural descriptions, and located the meaning units in psychological terms as they related to the overall theme of exploration of perceptions of marital distress among African American couples and the study's demographic population.

Before accessing any data or implementing any public survey, the researcher obtained volunteer permission of participants and Walden Universities IRB board. Human rights of participants were maintained with regard to providing all participants (a) informed consent; (b) protection from harm; and (c) consent to privacy. Consent forms helped ensure that participants' information remained anonymous and confidential. No one but the researcher and transcriptionist had access to the survey information and tape-recorded interviews. For data reporting purposes, each participant was identified by a number such as Interview one through seven, with men representing even numbers two,

four, six and women odd numbers one, three, five, and seven respectively. This number does not correspond to any special significance or place within the interview process. Ethical principles were followed for compliance in an ethical manner.

The researcher gave careful consideration to assure that steps were taken to protect the identity and integrity of volunteer participants and procedures throughout the process of future data collection. All information received from participants were replaced and assigned with a code that was only known to the researcher and kept in a locked cabinet at his home. The Interview Questionnaire (Appendix B) was developed to include every possible issue relative to the study population and surveys. Confidentiality, voluntary participation, researcher and chair contact information, and having the option to withdraw from participation, was provided to each individual participant at the time of the interview. Before the beginning of any data collection or interview of participants, Walden Universities Internal Review Board (IRB) granted permission after the chair approved the researcher's dissertation proposal section.

The expansion of this information helped the researcher gain insight into patterns within the data and developed a working knowledge of the phenomenology within this research study. Various themes surfaced and were examined for further interpretation and analysis of meaning. The final stage of examination involved the synthesis of all the information so that a solid explanation of observed themes could be formed. Once the themes were solved, final conclusions were drawn in regard to the data and its meaning. All final conclusions will be shared and available for future scholarly research comparative questions and future recommendations for usage in clinical training.

Results

A qualitative phenomenological research strategy was implemented for this study. This strategy allowed human behavior to be researched so that the body of knowledge in the social sciences can be expanded. These three research questions were produced to guide this research:

RQ1. How do African American couples define their marriage?

RQ2. How do coping mechanism and attachment styles contribute to marital dissatisfaction?

RQ3. How do African American couples feel their socioeconomic experiences can influence their marriage?

How do African American Couples Define Their Marriage?

Seven African American participants (three males and four females) participated in this study. Based on the information gathered, most of the individuals expressed various definitions of how they defined marriage dissatisfaction. Most of the individuals who were interviewed (all of these individuals were female) believed that part of marital dissatisfaction stemmed from issues in feeling “happy” with the marriage. (“The spouses are no longer happy...I would say unhappy more often than happy...To be satisfied in a marriage would be to be happy and content.”). Individuals also believed that part of marital dissatisfaction stemmed from issues in communication between the spouses, which would sometimes manifest itself through arguing (“You are arguing all the time....Failed to communicate about it....The way they respond to one another, it is dissatisfied in that connection.”). Most of the individuals who were interviewed had

positive thoughts and feelings to express about their spouse, and had feelings of love toward their spouse (“I love my spouse...I admire him...I love him, and am in love with him...I feel great about my spouse...I love my wife...I still like him, I still love him...”). Two individuals (both were male) had very passionate feelings and thoughts about their spouse (“She is the air that I breathe. It might sound a little cheesy, but she is my world. And I guess they say that you shouldn’t make anybody your whole world, but truth of the matter is, she is my whole world... She is my wife. She is a part of me. I am a part of her.”). Other individuals (female participants) had positive feelings toward their spouse, but also had a few hesitations (“I love my spouse, however, I hate to put a but on it, but he gets on my nerves...He challenges everything I say....Through good times and bad times, I know that he is there. I just know that my spouse doesn’t know how to be there for me. I don’t think that he is able to sometimes come from my point of view in understanding from where I am and so we have a little bit of difficulties with that.”). Two of the individuals (both female participants) who were interviewed knew that their spouses had expressed loving and positive feelings about them (“He says that he loves me. He told me that I’m a good wife. That I’m a good mother. He calls me beautiful a lot. He tells me how proud he is of me.... I think he admires me in both the areas of strengths and weaknesses. I think that he admires them, because I think it balances us.”). Most of the others who were interviewed talked about how their spouse seemed to express mixed feelings towards them (“She says that I inspire her in many ways. She also expressed how I disappoint her in many areas...She tells me that she loves me and I don’t really get much of a verbal expression in my view from her.....That I talk too much. He is proud of

me.”). Yet two others interviewed seemed to believe that their spouses were dissatisfied, and had expressed negative feelings towards them (“He would be dissatisfied also....I think the dissatisfaction and what my wife wants, she tries to just, her nature is to be a fixer or to make sure that everything is alright.”)

How do Coping Mechanism and Attachment Styles Contribute to Marital Dissatisfaction?

For the participants in this study, being able to bond and connect with their spouse was very important but difficult to achieve. Various reasons were given for reasons behind the participants’ inability to connect and bond with their spouses. In the context of the marriage experience, two of the individuals who were interviewed commented on how they believed that marriage is work (“Marriage is work. It’s more work than my full-time job....Marriage is work. You have to physically put in work.”). Some of the individuals who were interviewed did not believe that they bond well at times with their spouse, or they had a negative bonding experience with their spouse (“I don’t think we bond well enough. I think our level of intimacy or bonding intimacy is lacking... That was one experience that was leading to dissatisfaction. I couldn’t bond that way. And I would deal with it negatively.”) One individual (a female participant) believed that challenges and problems within the marriage helped her and her spouse to bond better. Another individual (a male participant) believed that he and his wife bonded well when they met (“I think we bonded in a great way in how we met, with knowing each other and having a chemistry of being able to talk from the very beginning.”).

The inability to communicate was another factor that altered coping and marriage attachment. Several of the individuals who were interviewed (female participants) commented about how sex and intimacy was a topic that was communicated about often (“There is a lot of communication about sex...If I had to put them in order, I would probably say: communication about sex and intimacy is number one.”). Other individuals commented on how they communicated about their kids with their spouse (“We talk about the kids....The kids’ schedule.”). Most individuals commented on how they communicated about finances with their spouse (“There is a lot of communication about money....We will communicate about finances, we communicate about things that we would like to come in possession of....We talk about money often....We communicate about finances.”). Several of the individuals who were interviewed also commented on how they discussed the Scriptures and their relationship with God with their spouse (“The positive things that we talk about are our relationships with God...We communicate about the Word a lot...We talk about the Scriptures.”).

Family and surrounding issues were other factors noted among participants that influenced perceptions of proper coping and attachment in marriage relationships. There were several negative and positive influences to the individuals who were interviewed, in regards to their view of marriage. Several of those who were interviewed believed that their parents/family didn’t provide positive examples of a satisfied marriage (“If I had to use my family and folk around me, I don’t have no real good examples..., My parents have had some rocky times in their marriage.....I don’t know if I have any really good examples to follow cause my mom and dad over the years seem to have a lot of fighting,

and a whole lot of hang-ups and hurt feelings that never really seemed to get resolved. And that's the example that I have to go by.") One male participant turned that around to learn from ("In my family, I always thought that my mom was not satisfied. I always thought that my dad was not satisfied. There was a constant disconnect. So how do they influence me? I took that positively. I turned it around positively"). Another individual (a female participant) commented on the positive influence of the church ("I think our church family is a strong influence. To fight for marriage...").

Seeing things differently was another major factor that limited healthy coping and attachment among married participants. Most of the individuals who were interviewed believed that they saw most things differently from their spouse ("We see differently on a lot of different things....I think my spouse sees it differently....We see a lot of things differently....Being that we have different needs...It seems like we see everything differently.") It seemed that these individuals had different ideas about why they have different opinions than their spouse. One female participant believed it was due to the way they were raised. Another female participant believes it is due to different needs in marriage. Two individuals (both female participants) commented on the importance of communication, and the connection between communication and seeing things differently ("One of the key components of a healthy marriage is being able to communicate effectively....I do think we have a communication breakdown.").

Lastly, how couples interact was reported as a major influence of perceived coping and attachment problems among participants interviewed. Several of the individuals who were interviewed believed that they get along very well with their

spouse, and interact well with them (“We get along very well. We laugh, we talk, and we communicate. I look forward to seeing him....We always set aside a time in the evening when the kids are in bed to have that us time. Whether we use it to talk or to watch TV, that’s our bonding time...I think that we interact with each other pretty good.”). Two of the individuals (both male participants) commented on their control of their tone in regards to their interactions with their spouses (“It’s more peaceful now than it was in the past. I’m in more control of my tone now....I’m being conscious of keeping my anger down and not being explosive and reactive.”). Two other individuals, who were married to each other, believe that their interactions aren’t in the best of situations (“Right now it’s shaky....I think we are hit and miss.”).

How do African American Couples Feel Their Socioeconomic Experiences can Influence Their Marriage?

For participants in this study, all seven participants felt their socioeconomic experiences, social environment, and exposure to financial constraints and upper mobility had a major influence on their perception of marriage dissatisfaction. Two of the individuals interviewed (both female participants) commented on not having had a lot of previous long-term relationships (“I haven’t had a lot of long-term relationships...I didn’t want to date.”). One individual interviewed (a female participant) commented on her mostly having had previous long-term relationships (“Most of my relationships have been

long-term...”). One individual (a male participant) commented on how he would mostly bond sexually with previous relationships (“I bond mainly sexually”).

The participants of this study also reported that experiences within their surrounding environment influenced their perception of marriage dissatisfaction. Several of the individuals interviewed commented on how finances affect their relationship (“Our money. Our finances definitely affect our relationship...We have had some money problems, and the way I behave with money really causes our relationship to not be in the area of satisfaction.....The only things that really affect my marriage are the things that are close to me like my financial situation.”). Several of the individuals interviewed commented on how family experiences (especially growing up) and viewing the relationships/marriages of others influenced their own marriage (“Other failed marriages cause me to bond closer to my husband....Looking at family members and other people going through certain things...His daddy got divorced three times. His mother has been divorced twice.”).

All seven participants interviewed reported positive memories in their marriage, but only 20% of participants interviewed associated meeting their spouse as the best marriage memory. Most of the positive memories that the individuals interviewed commented on spending quality time with their spouse bonding and connecting, making

positive memories (“We’ll go get a cup of coffee late at night and sit in the driveway and talk for hours. We are not arguing. No arguing, we are just kinda eating and relaxing and laughing...I think our ability to have dinner and walk and laugh...She was pulling me in so I could not only share about my problems, I can share about my likes, what inspires me, what I dream about...And when we do have some down time, we are able to giggle and play...We have had some pretty good date nights.”). Two individuals commented on meeting their spouse as being a good memory (“When we first met, I think that’s a great memory...I love the memory of us coming together...”). Two other individuals (both female participants) commented on family trips and vacations as being positive memories.

The majority of participants interviewed stated that an increase in wealth and status would positively affect their marriage. One of seven participants (female participant) reported that an increase in wealth and status would negatively affect their marriage and associated being comfortable and financially secure as a fear. All of the individuals who were interviewed believe that a chance at upward mobility would greatly affect their marriage. Most of the individuals believed that it would affect their marriage in a positive way, by taking off stress (“It won’t cure all the problems, but it would certainly I think be a relief as far as what we buy, when we buy it. It wouldn’t solve

everything cause money isn't everything and we all know that but it would definitely solve some of our life issues and concerns that might change how we act with each other, I would hope...I think finances would be a great way of helping us to stabilize and get to where we would like to be....I think it would be an excellent influence. We both have goals, things we want to accomplish, so of course that would help us achieve our goals....I think that would have a tremendous effect on my relationship because that speaks to her love language, acts of service more....I think that would put a light above his head, and emotionally he would need it.”). One of the individuals interviewed (a female participant) believed it would have a negative effect on her relationship with her spouse (“I think it would destroy us...Anything beyond being comfortable is a fear, because I don't know myself well enough to say I would be grounded.2”).

In order to provide the best interview context to explore and include various discrepancies among participant responses into the analysis, self-directed interview questions were developed by the researcher in an effort to help individual participants explore and reflect on their life experiences of marriage dissatisfaction.

Category A: Definition of Marital Dissatisfaction

Interview Question 1: Tell me how you feel about your spouse? This question allowed participants to reflect on the perception of their spouse and how their experience defines marital dissatisfaction. All four females interviewed believed that part of marital

dissatisfaction stemmed from issues in feeling “happy” with the marriage. Three of 7 individuals believed that part of marital dissatisfaction could be defined as issues stemmed from communication problems and arguments. Table 2 lists descriptive phrases and statement that the interviewees used in this category.

Table 2

Marital Dissatisfaction: Definition of Marriage Dissatisfaction

Gender	ID #	Theme 1: : Definition of <i>marital dissatisfaction</i>
Female	1	You are arguing all the time. You don't feel like you have a sanctuary at home.
Male	2	I think to be martially dissatisfied is that you are not getting maybe all of your needs met. And that you have or had a perceived notion of what you thought marriage would be. And then it didn't become that.
Female	3	I think marital dissatisfaction means to me that the marriage is no longer growing. That the marriage has ceased from growing. That the spouses are not content with one another...And that they are no longer happy.
Male	4	I think that is an area where either the couple or the one individual in the relationship is not satisfied with the other spouse. Their interaction with one another, the way they perceive one another, the way they respond to one another, it is dissatisfied in that connection. Maybe the way my spouse perceives me.
Female	5	I would say unhappy more often than happy.
Male	6	I would say that dissatisfaction is a situation where you have two people who failed to yield to each other's needs. And failed to communicate about it.
Female	7	To be satisfied in a marriage would be to be happy and content. To understand that you are part of a team. To have respect from someone that is your spouse in all aspects of life. Your good times and your bad times, and to ultimately put God first and to pray together to get through the good times, or the bad times. And just knowing that you are loved unconditionally for the person that you are, for the type personality that you have.

Category B: Feelings Toward Spouse

Interview Question 2: Tell me about the thoughts your spouse has expressed about

you? This question was developed so that participants could reflect on their spouse's perceptions of his or her mate's marriage experience and how this defines their marriage dissatisfaction. Most of the individuals who were interviewed had positive thoughts and feelings of love toward their spouse. Two of seven participants (both were male) had very passionate feelings and thoughts about their spouse. Two of three females expressed having positive feelings about their spouse, but also had a few hesitations. These hesitations involved confrontation from their spouse and inability of the male spouse to know how to cope, attach, and be there for their female spouse. Table 3 lists descriptive phrases and statements that the interviewees used in this category.

Table 3

Marital Dissatisfaction : Feelings Toward Spouse

Gender	ID #	Theme 2: : Feelings toward spouse
Female	1	I love my spouse, however, I hate to put a "but" on it, but he gets on my nerves...He challenges everything I say.
Male	2	I think that we try to get past the dissatisfaction. We try to empathize with one another about what our needs are. But I think we tend to take it for granted that you are supposed to know what the other should want or desire and so it then comes into play an ability to communicate about them. If you don't communicate that, that further feeds into that dissatisfaction.
Female	3	I admire him. I greatly admire him. I love him, and am in love with him.
Male	4	Well, I feel great about my spouse. She is my wife. She is a part of me, I'm a part of her. So generally, I love her dearly. Am I dissatisfied? I don't know if that's part of the question, but I feel generally good about our relationship. I feel great about her and

who she is.

Female	5	I love my spouse. I think he is very attentive. He tries his best to do for the family. And I know that he loves me and that's a good feeling.
Male	6	I love my wife. She is the air that I breathe. It might sound a little cheesy, but she is my world. And I guess they say that you shouldn't make anybody your whole world, but truth of the matter is, she is my whole world.
Female	7	I still like him...I still love him. Through good times and bad times, I know that he is there. I just know that my spouse doesn't know how to be there for me....I don't think that he is able to sometimes come from my point of view in understanding from where I am and so we have a little bit of difficulties with that. But overall, I still like him, I still love him.

(table continues)

Category C: Thoughts Spouse Expressed Toward You

Interview Question 3: Tell me about the thoughts your spouse has expressed about

you? This question defines how the thoughts of a participant's spouse influence their perception of their spouse's marriage dissatisfaction. Two of seven (both females) stated that their mates had expressed loving and positive feelings about them. Five of seven participants spoke of their spouses' mixed thoughts and feelings about them. Two of seven participants interviewed expressed they believe that their spouses are dissatisfied and have expressed negative feelings towards them. Table 4 summarizes these responses.

Table 4

Marital Dissatisfaction: Thoughts Spouse Expressed Toward You

Gender ID # Theme 3: : Thoughts Spouse Expressed Toward You		
Female	1	He would be dissatisfied also. Sex is a huge issue for him, what we are and are not doing, cause I am closed off regarding it. That I don't trust him.

Male	2	I have mixed emotions about it, because at times, I don't feel that it is adequately known or understand what is lacking. Again because of what is or isn't happening. But I think the dissatisfaction and what my wife wants, she tries to just her nature is to be a fixer or to make sure that everything is alright.
Female	3	His thoughts are that I am complicated....that I'm really complicated...I think that I can be a little unpredictable. I think when he feels like he has me figured out, he finds that ok, there's still a lot to learn....Although that appears to sound negative, I think that he actually admires that...I think he admires me in both the areas of strength and weaknesses. I think that he admires them, because I think it balances us.
Male	4	She thinks greatly of me. She says that I inspire her in many ways. She says that she loves me more than I love her. She also expresses how I disappoint her in many areas. She easily sees what is not right about me and she tries to correct them or she tries to expose them to me so that I can correct them.
Female	5	He says he loves me. He told me that I'm a good wife. That I'm a good mother. He calls me beautiful a lot. He tells me how proud he is of me because of a lot going on right now in my life. And just of the way I handle things.
Male	6	She tells me that she loves me and I don't really get much of a verbal expression in my view from her. I think she tries to love me in her language, which is acts of service. Which doesn't really speak that loudly to me, even though it is appreciated. It doesn't speak that loudly to me cause it's not my language. But every now and then she will surprise me and say something or do a little something that lets me know she cares, but she doesn't really speak as loud to me. You know, in a language that I can understand.
Female	7	That I talk too much. He is proud of me. I know that. He is proud of all my accomplishments. He appreciates the fact that I am a good mom and a good stepmom to his daughter. I know my husband loves my heart. He would say that I am a good woman.

(table continues)

Category D: Marriage Experiences

Interview Question 4: Tell me about how your marriage experiences contribute to your view of marriage? This question was didactic, in that it led participants to explore specific coping and attachment experiences, which changed how they perceived marriage dissatisfaction. In this section two participants who were interviewed commented on how they believed marriage takes work in terms of coping and attachment experiences. Five of seven participants interviewed stated challenges and negative experiences increased marriage dissatisfaction in their marriage and had difficulty coping and attaching to each other. Four of seven interviewed did not believe they bonded well at times with their spouse, and stated they have had negative bonding experiences with their spouse. One of seven (female participant) believed that challenges and problems within the marriage helped her and her spouse to bond better. One of seven (male participant) believed he and his wife bonded well at the beginning of their relationship, but once married issues surrounding sexual intimacy decreased their ability to attach and cope in a healthy manner. Table 5 summarizes these responses.

Table 5

Describe Your Coping /Attachment Dissatisfaction Experience: Marriage Experiences

Gender ID # Theme 4: : Marriage Experiences		
Female	1	I don't think we bond well enough. I think our level of intimacy or bonding intimacy is lacking....I'm not a priority.
Male	2	I think it's two-folded in regards that I think we bonded in a great way in how we met, with knowing each other and having a chemistry of being able to talk from the very beginning. Once we became married and there became maybe some pitfalls or trials or barriers to us bonding a little better when it came to being sexually involved or talking a little bit more in depth, that's

where you get that break....So now I have to bag up or be able to create some space to have a moment to process this information to better bond....And so it is essential that you understand all principles, all the information I think.

Female	3	Challenges and problems within the marriage bring us closer together. I try not to take anything for granted, although I enjoy good times and peaceful times, but I don't take it for granted. Because I know that we will have our share of problems, but I look at those problems or challenges that we have as an opportunity to show our love towards one another. I think that the challenges and problems that we face actually brings us closer. It helps us to get to know one another in areas that maybe we have never had a chance to observe of one another. How we handle certain problems. I think that's when my vows are challenged. That it's more than just words, but they are commitments. So that's how I see the problems and challenges. I think it strengthens the marriage.
Male	4	In an early part of our marriage, anytime that my wife was dealing with something that bothered her, she would take a physical position in talking to me, which is a message in itself. That was one experience that was leading to dissatisfaction. I couldn't bond that way. And I would deal with it negatively.
Female	5	As of lately, I view myself as having a healthy marriage. I'm more happy than unhappy. I mean of course there have been some negative experiences. And there was a time when I would say that my marriage was unhealthy (lots of arguing, a lot of selfishness, pride, insecurities, fear), but as of recently, I think I have a fairly healthy marriage.
Male	6	Marriage is work. It's more work than my full-time job. It's a lot of mental exercise, a lot of emotional and physical work. I think it's a learning curve for me, and it's growing pains.
Female	7	Growing up, I watched my parents get divorced. The fact that I am a Christian and believe in marriage and unity and having a marriage and being married to your friend to raise a family, and to have a partner for life, that is my foundation. I watched my grandparents stay together, and they were married till death do they part.....Marriage is work. You have to physically put in work.

(table continues)

Category E: Communicate About Often

Interview Question 5: Tell me about the things you and your mate communicate about

often? This question was developed so that participants could reflect on their conversational experiences and their relationship with marriage dissatisfaction. In this section all four women interviewed stated that sexual intimacy and finances were major topics of conversations with their spouse. Three of the seven participants noted talking about their relationship with God as positive conversation. Two of the three males stated that their mate does not communicate about their relationship with them well. Table 6 summarizes descriptive phrases that participants expressed for this category.

Table 6

Describe Your Coping /Attachment Dissatisfaction Experience: Communication

Gender ID # Theme 5: : Communication		
Female	1	There is a lot of communication about money and sex. Those are the negative things. The positive things that we talk about are our relationships with God.
Male	2	?
Female	3	The future. Things that we desire to have. We will communicate about finances, we communicate about things that we would like to come in possession of, whether it's a house or a car or a promotion. We communicate about the Word a lot. We try to have devotions together as much as we can, even to sacrifice to make that happen. We have to sacrifice to get that time together. I think it's a balance of speaking about spiritual, health, finances, where we are emotionally.
Male	4	We talk about us. We talk about our day, we talk about what we are going through in the course of a day. We talk about the Scriptures. We talk about the kids. We talk about money often.
Female	5	We communicate about the children, we communicate about intimacy or sex. My husband is more of a communicator than I am. So he will communicate about his day, what happens at

work. We communicate about finances. If I had to put them in order, I would probably say: communication about sex and intimacy is number 1, then kids, and then finances.

Male	6	We don't do a whole lot of it. I think a conversation in my definition is an act of exchange for both parties. With a come and go. I don't think I get that from her. It's usually, I engage her, I probe her. I may or may not get information that I am requesting. I don't know if we really know how to talk to each other yet.
Female	7	The kids' schedule. Finances, and family factors. Our parents and those that are around us that affect us in some way.

(table continues)

Category F: Family, Those Around Influence Perception of Satisfied Marriage

Interview Question 6: Tell me about the way your family and people you are around influence your current perception of what it means to have a satisfied marriage? This question delves into the influence family and social relationship experiences have upon the participant's perception of marriage satisfaction. Findings in this section revealed several positive and negative influences to the individual who were interviewed, in regards to their view of how their marriage was influenced by various family and social relationships. Two of seven individuals interviewed stated that their parents and family did not provide positive examples of a satisfied marriage. One of seven interviewed (male) stated that they turned the negative example into a positive one, and one of seven (female) participants commented that those in the church helped turn poor marriage examples into positive ones. Table 7 summarizes these responses.

Table 7

Describe Your Coping /Attachment Dissatisfaction Experience: Familial Influence

Gender ID # Theme 6: : How Family Influences Perception of Satisfied Marriage		
Female	1	I unfortunately, had an idealistic view of marriage. From watching TV, reading all the books I have read...And then watching my friends and my parents be married and what I thought should happen to him and I. I had a lot of ideals.
Male	2	If I had to use my family and folk around me, I don't have no real good examples. If I use that as a method for really kind of being the parameter, there's been a lot of divorces. And society as a whole, if you really looked at it, you wouldn't give marriage a chance, you wouldn't give marriage a shot.
Female	3	I think our church family is a strong influence. To fight for marriage when you are looking at it from a spiritual scope, Christ versus the Devil...I believe that the church family is a strong influence to make right decisions to endure, to persevere, to go through long suffering, and to know that it's not strange to suffer or to be challenged in your marriage...I believe fellowshiping with one another, and letting you know that there's nothing new under the sun, that you aren't facing some new thing that we haven't already gone through....Of course my parents are a strong influence.
Male	4	In my family, I always thought that my mom was not satisfied. I always thought that my dad was not satisfied....There was a constant disconnect. So how do they influence me? I took that positively. I turned it around positively.
Female	5	My parents have had some rocky times in their marriage. I would probably view their marriage as being ok. My husband and I have been through counseling. I realize that everybody's got some issues in their marriage. Nobody's marriage is perfect. It makes me look at what I have, and it's a blessing because we have come a long way and it could be a lot worse than it is. And it could be better than what it is. Just because we might have some issues in our marriage, I still perceive our marriage as being a healthy marriage.
Male	6	I don't know if I have any really good examples to follow cause my mom and dad over the years seem to have a lot of fighting, and a whole lot of hangups and hurt feelings that never really seemed to get resolved. And that's the example that I have to go by.
Female	7	Communication and downtime. Life is gonna keep you busy. But you need to stop and talk to each other. If you don't stop and the couple themselves have some down time, it's gonna

get away from you. Life is gonna get in the way regardless.

(table continues)

Category G: Seeing Things Differently

Interview Question 7: Tell me about some of the ways you and your spouse may see

things differently? This question helped participants explore how seeing things

differently from their spouse influences the way they cope and attach within their

relationship and perceptions of marriage dissatisfaction. All seven participants (male and

female) interviewed stated that on average, they see most things differently from their

spouse. Although all interviewed admitted to seeing things differently than their mate,

there were variations in their opinions about why this occurred. One of four female

participants believed this is due to the way their parents raised them, another suggested

these differences were due to different expectations or needs in marriage. Two of four

female participants commented on communication of differences to their mate as an

influence to seeing things differently. Table 8 summarizes these descriptive responses.

Table 8

Describe Your Coping /Attachment Dissatisfaction Experience: Differences in Perception

Gender	ID #	Theme 7: : Differences in Perception
Female	1	We see differently on a lot of different things. I often tell him there's more than one way to skin a cat.
Male	2	I think my spouse sees it differently because she thinks that I'm working. I work and I put my physical fitness, my overall health in the mix and so that time kinda battles with the time that I think that she thinks I should put in with her and that creates a dissatisfaction.
Female	3	We see a lot of things differently. I'm an observer and I'm a thinker, and so, I look at a situation, and we're bumping heads,

with our views or are seeing things through a different perspective, I think it has a lot to do with the way we were raised.

Male	4	She has helped me see the things that I don't see, and a lot of times I don't see anything. But then sometimes, when she sees she is helping me, sometimes when she is wrong, or it's hard sometimes for me to disagree with her.
Female	5	Being that we have different needs, He may view a healthy marriage as consisting of the more sex you have, the healthier your marriage is. Being able to listen and speak both sides is a really health marriage. One of the key components of a health marriage is being able to communicate effectively.
Male	6	It seems like we see everything differently. I seem to be more of a pessimist and she seems to be more of an optimist.
Female	7	To be honest with you, we kinda are on the same page....But I do think we have a communication breakdown there (with scheduling). We don't see eye to eye there. And overall, as far as any decisions, he leaves them up to me, and then when I ask, he gets upset.

(table continues)

Category H: Interact With Each Other

Interview Question 8: Tell me about the way you and your spouse interact with each

other? This question allowed participants to express how their interactions with their mate influenced their perception of marriage dissatisfaction. Four of seven participants interviewed stated their interactions with each other were not stable or healthy. Three of the seven participants who suggested they interact well with their spouse contributed setting aside time, communication, and controlling their tone in regards to their spouse as positive interactive things in their relationship. Table 9 summarizes these descriptive responses.

Table 9

Describe Your Coping /Attachment Dissatisfaction Experience: Interaction

Gender ID # Theme 8: : Interaction with Each Other		
Female	1	Right now it's shaky. We will have weeks or days of, it seems to me that we have bonded well. That we get along well and I love him to pieces, and then in a flash, he will say or do something or don't say or do something and it's on and popping and it just stinks....I would like us to not argue so much.
Male	2	I think we are hit and miss. Sometimes we ebb and flow and we do really well. To have a good time and I think other times we then miss that mark. But other times, then there's another time where we will ebb and glow. We will be in together and we will be in sync.
Female	3	We get along very well. We laugh, we talk, we communicate. I look forward to seeing him and chatting with him about my day. I believe it's vise versa. We enjoy a lot of the same things, desire to do a lot of the same things...
Male	4	It's peaceful. It's more peaceful now than it was in the past. I'm in more control more of my tone now.
Female	5	We have physical interaction. We always set aside a time in the evening when the kids are in bed to have that us time. Whether we use it to talk or to watch TV. That's out bonding time. So that's mainly how we interact. Most of our negative interactions come because, most of it is about sex and intimacy. His high need for it, and mine doesn't match that so that's where a lot of our negative interactions come in.
Male	6	I think we interact with each other pretty good. It depends on what is going on. If I am working and giving her the benefit of the doubt, and I'm being conscious of keeping my anger down and not being explosive and reactive, we seem to get along pretty good. She's not much of a communicator. I feel rejected, pushed away, and isolated.
Female	7	I have labeled me and him as Edith and Archie Bonker. The little angry old man who got a big old heart. And the sweet little old lady that, she don't care what Archie says, she do her own thing. That's where we are right now. We can change, but that's just where we are right now.

Category I: Relationship History

Interview Question 9: Tell me about your relationship history? This question allowed participants to delve into their relationship history (prior to their marriage) to see how former relationship encounters influenced their current perception of marriage dissatisfaction. Two of four female participants commented on not having had a lot of previous long-term relationship experience prior to their marriage. Most female participants interviewed expressed their relationship history in terms of time, whereas the majority of males expressed their relationship history in terms of sexual relationship history. Table 10 summarizes these descriptive responses.

Table 10

Socioeconomic / Coping Expressions of Dissatisfaction: Relationship History

Gender ID # Theme 9: : Relationship History		
Female	1	I haven't had a lot of long-term relationships. I had a lot of short-lived relationships before my husband. He is the longest relationship I have ever had. The longest intimate relationship I have ever had, to put it that way. Everything else has lasted no longer than four years.
Male	2	?
Female	3	I come from a large family...and I had a chance to observe my brothers and sisters mistakes. I observed their relationships and their friends and the company that they kept. I chose to be a more of a loner, and I was fine with that, I was content with that...I didn't want to date. My sisters and my brothers dated and I think they wore me out so much with all of their issues. I had friends, I had guys pursue me, and I was totally uninterested. I was in a previous marriage, and I married someone who was in the military and I think I married too early.

Male	4	I bond mainly sexually. And in the overall history with the opposite sex, first thought on my mind. How good they look, and then later on, more than that, how they thought, how intelligent were they....But I sold myself out to that. Just sexual desire, pretty much. And to look good in the presence of others because of who was with me.
Female	5	I was married before my marriage lasted for two years. In between divorcing and meeting my husband, I didn't date a whole lot....
Male	6	I've not been the most stable person. I have been known to rush into things. Catch feelings real quick. Want to get into a relationship, get emotionally and sexually involved right away. I'm usually the romantic. The one looking for love and I'm all in, relatively quick. Rushing into things is never good. It's been disastrous.... So I can't tell you what it would feel like to take it slow, cause I have never done that. I feel like I would get involved with one young lady, and then move on to the next one, I wouldn't leave myself time to get over the last one. I would leave one and jump right into the next one as soon as I could and then it would cause problems. So I feel that I carry a lot of baggage to the next relationship and I see that now, too bad I didn't see that, it took me 36 years to figure that out.
Female	7	Most of my relationships have been long-term. What I mean by long-term is over a year...I have had some short-term relationships. I guess I always kept the relationship still on the friendship basis...I tell people all the time, when you get married, you have to marry your friend, because that person is an individual.

(table continues)

Category J: Things Around you Influencing Marriage

Interview Question 10: Tell me about how things around you influence your marriage?

This question was developed to see how participants' socioeconomic experiences could influence their perception of marriage dissatisfaction. Five of seven participants interviewed commented on how financial money problems affect their relationship. Four of seven participants stated that their family had a negative effect on their perception of

their marriage relationship. Most of the females assigned prior family experiences as negative influences on their perception of marriage dissatisfaction and males assigned their children and financial issues that increased their level of marriage dissatisfaction.

Table 11 will further summarize participant's responses.

Table 11

Socioeconomic / Coping Expressions of Dissatisfaction: What Affects the Marriage

Gender ID # Theme 10: : What Affects the Marriage		
Female	1	Our money. Our finances definitely affect our relationship. Where we live....A lot, right now the biggest issues are finances, my medical challenges and sex.
Male	2	Well my girl feels dissatisfied with her look, with her style, with her own personal charisma, and I had to find out, that it was due to maybe health issues and then psychologically she has always been on top of it. She ain't never had to be down at the bottom, alright, and so as she was going and working and growing up, she's always been at the top of the curve where she has been as her social status. Now her economic status has kinda fallen and changed cause of the whole economic climate, and it, and she sometimes still holds on to what she wants, yet won't let go of everything so she clear it and then come back up to what you are going through. Where me, on the other side, I realize I had to put all my clothes in the car, left all my bed, all my furniture, couldn't take nothing with me.
Female	3	I see a lot of marriages break up and I believe that the marriages could have been saved. So other failed marriages cause me to bond closer to my husband. It causes me to see it more than just problems with one another.
Male	4	Church life really influenced us positively. We have had some money problems, and the way I behave with money really causes our relationship to not be in the area of satisfaction, which I am really working on that now, like never before. So money, church, kids.
Female	5	Looking at family members and other people going through certain things.
Male	6	The only things that really affect my marriage are the things that are close to me like my kids, my financial situation or

something like that, all that affects me.

Female	7	His daddy got divorced three times. His mother has been divorced twice....You still gotta go for what you want, not what had happened.
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(table continues)

Category K: Memories of Marriage

Interview Question 11: Tell me about some of the memories you have about your

marriage? This question was developed so participants could delve into how their former experiences influenced their perception of marriage satisfaction. All participants expressed having positive memorable experiences with their mate. Some of the experiences listed were: spending quality time, bonding and connecting with their spouse, and making positive memories of their marriage. Only two out of seven individuals associated the first meeting of their spouse as their best marriage memory. Some of the female participants noted family trips and vacations as positive memories of their marriage. Table 12 summarizes these comments.

Table 12

Socioeconomic / Coping Expressions of Dissatisfaction: Memories of Marriage

Gender ID # Theme 11: : Memories of Marriage		
Female	1	We go to QuikTrip and just sit and relax and chill out and eat hot dogs in the car, and it's very cute. Very high school ish, but nice. We'll go get a cup of coffee late at night and sit in the driveway and talk for hours....We are not arguing. No arguing, we are just kinda eating and relaxing and laughing.
Male	2	We are still very young, but I think we have some good memories. When we traveled together. We had a few better memories as to even before we were married.....I think our ability to have dinner and walk and laugh....Bad memories include all the fussing and the fighting.

Female	3	When we first met, I think that's a great memory of where I met my husband. We met on the job, and I think it's a great memory because the job where we worked, we had a lot of hungry men, and so when I was interested in my husband, it kind of baffled the other men around him.....When I met my husband, he had such a real, warm smile and it was so genuine and that just captivated me....Having our children, carrying his children was definitely a memorable moment.
Male	4	I love the memory of us coming together...She was pulling me in so I could not only share about my problems, I can share about my likes, what inspires me, what I dream about.
Female	5	The most recent memory, family vacations. Date nights. We have had some pretty good date nights. We also have separated twice.
Male	6	I got a lot of good memories. I think it's about half and half cause we just starting out, January 8 will be three years, and we spent roughly two thirds of that time in controversy. But we are creating good memories now.
Female	7	We had a wonderful wedding, a wonderful reception. We traveled, or we did travel a lot. We still go on trips for family stuff. I decided not to divorce him after I found out I had a step-child. We have had our good times and our bad times. And when we do have some down time, we are able to giggle and play.

(table continues)

Category L: Chance at Upward Mobility

Interview Question 12: Tell me about how finances and a chance of upward mobility

might influence your marriage? This question was developed to allow participants to consider if the experience of more money and upward mobility would affect their marriage perceptions. Six of seven participants interviewed believed this would have a positive influence on their marriage. One out of seven participants (a female participant) believed it would negatively affect both her and her spouse's ability to remain married, citing that a new rise in income and status would destroy them. She feared that the

experience of being comfortable and well off financially would affect her relationship negatively. It is important to note that this participant recently reported experiencing a substantial loss of income as a result of unemployment. Table 13 summarizes some of the comments provided by participants in this category.

Table 13

Socioeconomic / Coping Expressions of Dissatisfaction: Upward Mobility

Gender ID # Theme 12: : Chance of Upward Mobility		
Female	1	It would affect it greatly. It won't cure all the problems, but it would certainly I think be a relief as far as what we buy, when we buy it....It would affect where we travel, where we eat....It wouldn't solve everything cause money isn't everything and we all know that but it would definitely solve some of our life issues and concerns that might change how we act with each other, I would hope.
Male	2	I think finances would be a great way of helping us to stabilize and get to where we would like to be. I don't think money makes me but I think I make money and if I could do more with money, it allows the exchange of me to do the work that God will have me to do.
Female	3	I think it would destroy us. And I'm sure my husband would say the same thing. Because I have thought about that so many times. I think it would affect us in a negative way....Anything beyond being comfortable is a fear, because I don't know myself well enough to say I would be grounded.
Male	4	It's already started because I'm starting to budget. I'm focused intently on my money spending habits....I think she is seeing how focused I am, how responsible I am, and how as a man, I'm beginning to really financially take care of the home which is one of her desires....And it is changing the dynamics of our relationship because she is able to put more of her trust in me.
Female	5	I think it would be an excellent influence. We both have goals, things we want to accomplish, so of course that would help us achieve our goals. We are on the same page. It wouldn't cause me to love him any more or less...It would

		increase the security of our future, which would be less stressful.
Male	6	I think that would have a tremendous effect on my relationship because that speaks to her love language, acts of service more. I have noticed that our relationship has gotten a lot better since I have gotten a part time job and the financial pressure has been taken away. So money is not much of an issue...Before then, we were arguing and fighting constantly. And it was constant financial struggles all the time, and she didn't want to have sex, she was worrying about money and stuff and money would really turn things around, and relieve a lot of worry for her. Me too, but mostly her.
Female	7	I think that would put a light above his head, and emotionally he would need it. I mean, I need it too, but we would stay focused. We would give our 10% to the church and maybe more....we would make sure that the kids are set...we would pay off our bills, set up for us in retirement, set up for the kids to have something for their kids....We would get a financial planner.

(table continues)

Summary

This chapter reported data obtained from participants for this qualitative study, which explored perceptions of marriage dissatisfaction among African American married individuals. All of the participants within this study had been married at least one year and from a variety of different socioeconomic populations. The majority of participants were in their first marriage during the time of this interview. Overall, the majority of participants believed that marriage dissatisfaction stemmed from issues in feeling “happy” with their marriage. Most of the individuals interviewed expressed positive feelings about their spouse, but also were experiencing some hesitations and challenges with their spouse. The majority of women interviewed stated that they perceived sexual intimacy and finances as major areas among their male spouses for dissatisfaction.

Several participants reported unanimously that they saw things differently from their spouse and reported differences in needs within the marriage and lack of communication as the contributor to perceptual differences. The majority of participants interviewed believed their parents and family history did not provide positive examples of satisfied marriages for participants to emulate. The following chapter includes the thoughts, conclusions, and recommendations in retrospect of this study's findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of marital dissatisfaction and how these contribute to the formation of dissatisfaction among African American married couples. This study provided a qualitative methodology and examined understanding of how couples' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are attributed to perceived marital dissatisfaction within various social and relational environments. Although various studies are available on African American satisfaction in marriages, there is a lack of research on marriage dissatisfaction among African American couples through the lens of their coping, attachment, and socioeconomic experiences. Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk, and Sasser (2008) noted that there is a lack of research available that addresses interpersonal-level issues within African American marriages.

African American individuals who are married report difficulties in coping and bonding in various situations and environments. This is particularly true in relation to encounters within their family, attachments, historically learned behaviors, socioeconomic issues, dealing with controlling personalities, pressures from internal and external factors, and surviving various forms of emotional abuse. These difficulties in coping and bonding include both family systems and ecological systems (Garrett-Peters, Mills-Koonce, Zerwas, Cox, and Vernon-Feagans, 2011).

In terms of participants defining what marriage dissatisfaction meant to them, dissatisfaction resulted when there was an absence of being "happy" within a marriage.

This confirmed the importance of understanding marriage dissatisfaction through the lens of personal perceptions, since ambitions, meanings, and motivation for relationships are key factors of personal functioning within relationships (Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk, & Sasser, 2008).

Historically, the African American family was a fortress to marriage longevity in comparison to current declining marriage rates among African Americans. Participants interviewed in this study confirmed how important the role of family plays in maintaining a satisfied marriage relationship. Participants of this study made it clear that family time and taking time with each other on family trips and vacations were beneficial to the longevity of a positive marriage relationship.

In this study, several participants confirmed how important it was to maintain some level of proper coping and attachment among one's spouse as crucial contributors to a satisfied marriage. Most participants interviewed within this study did not feel they bonded well with their spouses. Additionally, the majority of participants interviewed noted factors, such as seeing things differently, as contributing to their inability to attach and cope appropriately with their spouse. Indeed, enduring vulnerabilities, encountering stressful events, and implementing effective adaptive processes are three major influences on one's relationship quality (Cutrona, Russell, Burzette, Wesner, & Bryant, 2011).

Another common theme confirmed in this study among African American married individuals and marriage dissatisfaction was the impact historical learned behavior has upon marriage relationships. Several participants interviewed believed that

their parents and family failed to provide them with a positive marriage example to emulate in their present marriage relationship. Factors such as: family and parental conflict, stressful environments, negative caregiving experiences, and incompatibility issues were given as points of reference.

The interviews also confirmed how important socioeconomic factors are in relation to participant's experience of marriage dissatisfaction. Most of the participants interviewed agreed that most of their spouse's conversation centered on finances. One couple mentioned that finances definitely affect their relationship. Several participants interviewed stated that a chance toward upward mobility would greatly affect their quality of marriage satisfaction in various positive ways. Although, one female participant believed upward mobility would have a negative effect on her relationship with her spouse and would destroy the relationship, this opinion might have been affected by the fact that at the time of this study the participant had recently reported experiencing a sudden loss of income. This participant seemed to have a sense of fearful anticipation if sudden upward mobility within their relationship was obtained. This participant's fear, however, is not supported by the literature; previous studies have shown that more stable financial situations result in positive social effects. A risk and resiliency study about the marital status of a single female African American parent revealed that although single motherhood is a risk factor for encountering psychological health problems, access to financial resources served as a protector among them from any psychological consequences of single parenthood. Results revealed that being poor and single contributed to psychological risk factors, but this was not true among single parents and

mothers with access to sufficient financial resources (Mandara, Johnston, Murray, & Varner, 2008). Furthermore, among African Americans, there was a benefit of being socioeconomically advantaged as a protector against divorce (Kim, 2012).

When asked about their perception of their controlling behavior and interactive quality between their spouses, seven participants of this study suggested that interactions with their spouse were in a positive light. Four of seven participants felt interactions with their spouse were not healthy. For this study, this confirmed that positive relationships among extended family and kin contribute to happiness and joy (Taylor, Budescu, Gebre, & Hodzic, 2014).

Two of the seven participants (both male participants) stated that their inability to control their anger in relation to their spouse was a major contributor to marital dissatisfaction. This finding is supported by the literature on controlling personalities as a perceptual root form of marriage dissatisfaction. Anger and aggression is more specifically associated with an individual's negative thought patterns and is affected by the way a person perceives others and what they expect from others as well (Guyll, Cutrona, Burzette, & Russell, 2010).

Personal lived internal and external experiences create perceptions of marriage dissatisfaction. Daily encounters of emotional abuse among African Americans can procure internal and external problems, which can lead to the formation of perceived marriage dissatisfaction. This was confirmed and particularly true among at least one African American male within this study who associated being strong and an African American female as domineering and unattractive traits. This view relegates strong

African American female traits as less attractive among African American males, and as a result, some men displace this frustration onto the African American female with whom they are in a relationship (Bethea, 1995).

Within this study, it was common among African American female participants to associate marriage satisfaction with their emotional feelings for their spouse; contrarily, African American male's emotions were sexually tied to emotional attachment with their spouse. This report confirms former findings within the literature that African American women are more emotionally invested in the marital relationship than African American males and encounter more emotionally abusive experiences than males within the context of the marriage relationship.

Limitations

Several limitations to trustworthiness arose while executing the study. There were eleven volunteer consents to participate in this study through the email invite from a partner agency. Four of the participants did not meet the ethnic criteria of African American descent, which reduced the number of participants to seven. The elimination of participants who failed to reach the groups definitions may have influenced the study and reduced the ability to properly interpret results outside of a particular group's representation. More diverse group representations from other ethnic groups from varied backgrounds, regions, and experiences outside of those who live in Mecklenburg County and the state of North Carolina may have produced different results. This omission could produce results that cannot be generalized back to the population of the United States.

This study's method of self-reported interview and volunteer responses to semi-structured questions can yield flawed responses on romantic self-reported interview questionnaires. Although volunteers consented to answer questions in an honest manner, often it is difficult for participants to be self-aware about their relationships and this could lead to discrepancies in their responses. Reductions of the above limitations were minimized by assuring that all of the volunteers understood the importance of completion of all surveys and that complete honesty in their responses was required. Participants were given adequate pre-interview instructions and assistance throughout the completion of the interview that needed additional support and clarity of instructions to complete the portion of the interview instrument.

Recommendations

There were seven African American participants for this study. A larger number of participants may have been possible by using a different recruitment method other than email solicitation from the partnering agency. A larger number of African Americans may have participated via other types of recruitment methods such as group retreat surveys, social media or telephone surveys. This study also did not offer any of its participant's incentives to encourage participation. In retrospect, it is possible that an incentive would have improved participation. Furthermore, because this study required approximately one-hour of time to complete the one-hour interview, and required the participant to meet during the evening, this may have discouraged participation from typically busy staff, faculty, and students. Therefore, future studies should carefully consider varying recruitment methods or possibly examine more than seven participants.

Future studies could also explore how socioeconomic, coping, and attachment styles contribute to marriage dissatisfaction among various other African American adults in other regions outside of Mecklenburg County of Charlotte North Carolina.

Implications

This study contributed to the literature on the perceptions of marriage dissatisfaction among African American married couples. This is a change from past studies that primarily examined marriage dissatisfaction among Non-African American couples. If this study is duplicated for future research it is recommended that African Americans pursuing marriage participate in further research on marriage dissatisfaction, which will allow the researcher to obtain other relevant data behind pre-marital expectations and intentions formulated prior to entering marriage relationships. Also data should be collected on pre-marriage compatibility of expectations and dissatisfaction resolve.

Further research is needed on behaviors in dating relationships among African American couples, especially in terms of understanding various expectant levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction criteria that individuals and couples have formulated over time through parents, friends, and cultural perceptions of satisfaction.

Social Change

The implications of these findings for greater society suggest that African Americans experiencing some form of marriage dissatisfaction can gain an understanding of its causes and work to reduce the coping, attachment, and socioeconomic contributors to them. Furthermore, this study contributed to social change because it examined the

African American socioeconomic, coping, and attachment style contributors to perceived marriage dissatisfaction within various African American contexts. Past studies have primarily focused on European models of marriage satisfied and dissatisfied relationships and limited their scope of study in relation to socioeconomic, coping, and attachment style contributory experiences within dissatisfied marriages. Only a few studies have explored coping, attachment, and socioeconomic effects upon African American marriages and dissatisfied perceptions within the marriage context.

This study increased what is known about African American adults by examining two groups: African American Attachment Coping Dissatisfaction (AAACD) and African American Attachment Dissatisfaction (AAAD). Differences were found between the two groups in attachment styles (avoidant/anxious), reported levels of relationship satisfaction, and loneliness. Moreover, this study explored how educational and socioeconomic levels among African Americans may have a positive effect on loneliness, secure attachment behaviors, and higher levels of personal and other people relationship satisfaction. Among adults, secure attachment is regarded as positive internal views of self and others, while insecure adult attachments are characterized by internal negative perceptions of self and others (Martin et al., 2012).

This study of two groups of African American adults did not find that the presence or absence of parental divorce during childhood influenced attachment styles, relationship satisfaction, or loneliness. However, this study pinpointed a number of experiences that are dominant among African Americans, which may influence marriage and divorce rates as a result of parental divorce experiences among their children. The

broad scope of literature shared in this study may be useful in improving an overall understanding of African Americans marriage dissatisfied perceptions within one's marriage relationship.

The qualitative method is the ideal method of choice when researching human experiences and perceptions. Additionally, phenomenological theory is the most preferred model of understanding the authentic nature of one's self and proved to be the most appropriate process of understanding the personal real life experience of participants. This study's qualitative and phenomenological theoretical approach enabled the researcher to retrieve a clearer understanding of behavioral dynamics in relation to participants' coping, attachment, and socioeconomic life experiences.

Conclusion

This study has shown the importance of exploring perceptions of dissatisfaction among African American married individuals. It researched the thoughts, understanding, and lived experiences of African American married individuals within the context of various coping, attachment, and socioeconomic experiences. The findings showed that most married individuals define marriage dissatisfaction as the absence of being "happy" within the marriage context. Additionally, findings showed that although most of the participants interviewed shared positive thoughts about their spouse (in terms of dissatisfaction) the majority of participants still embodied a sense of hesitation in terms of being fully satisfied in their marriage relationship with their spouse. Within this study the majority of participants agreed that communication was a key component within satisfied marriages and a majority of interviewees had different opinions and thoughts

during times of communication. Several participants expressed that their inability to cope and attach properly increased their perceived notions of marriage dissatisfaction with their spouse and some viewed these as points of contention, while others viewed these as a spring board from which to work to keep dissatisfied feelings at a minimum. Overall, marriage dissatisfaction patterns within these individuals were similar to marriage dissatisfaction literature I found among other ethnic groups in the United States. It benefits people who are in married relationships to gain a clearer understanding of their spouse's dissatisfaction perceptions. Knowledge of these perceptions will help individuals and couples create stronger, intimate bonds between their spouse, strong families, and harmonious shared relationships.

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Appendix A

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your sex?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

2. What is your age?

- ☐ 30-35
- ☐ 36-40
- ☐ 41-45
- ☐ 46-50
- ☐ 51-55

3. Are you:

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Never been married
- ☐ Remarried
- ☐ Divorced more than once
- ☐ A member of an unmarried couple

4. If you are married, how old were you when you married?

- ☐ 18- 21
- ☐ 22-25
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 51-over
- ☐ Not Applicable

6. Are your parents:

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Never been married
- ☐ Remarried
- ☐ Divorced more than once
- ☐ A member of an unmarried couple

7. If your parents have ever been married, what age were you when they married?

- ☐ They married before I was born
- ☐ Birth to 5 years old
- ☐ 6 to 10 years old

- ☐ 11 to 13 years old
- ☐ 14 to 18 years old
- ☐ Older than eighteen years old
- ☐ My parents never married

8. If your parents divorced when you were a child, how old were you at the time of their divorce?

- ☐ Birth to age 5
- ☐ 6 to 10 years old
- ☐ 11 to 15 years old
- ☐ 16 to 18 years old
- ☐ 18 and older
- ☐ Not Applicable, they remained married
- ☐ Not Applicable, they separated but never divorced

9. What is your current household income in U.S. dollars?

- ☐ Under \$10,000
- ☐ \$10,000-\$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000-29,999
- ☐ \$30,000-\$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000-\$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000-\$74,999

- o \$75,000-99,999
- o \$100,000-\$150,000
- o Over \$150,000
- o Would rather not say

Appendix B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PART A - Define Marriage Dissatisfaction Experiences

RQ1. How do African American Couples define their marriage?

1. Tell me how you feel about your spouse?
2. Tell me about the thoughts your spouse has expressed about you?

Part B: Ascertain African American Couples Coping and Attachment**Dissatisfaction Experiences**

RQ2. How do coping mechanism and attachment styles contribute to marital dissatisfaction?

1. Tell me about how your marriage experiences contribute to your view of marriage?
2. Tell me about the things you and your mate communicate about often?
3. Tell me about the way your family and people you're around influences your current perception of what it means to have a satisfied marriage?
4. Tell me about some of the ways you and your spouse may see things differently?
5. Tell me about the way that you and your spouse interact with each other?

Part C: Ascertain African American married individuals socioeconomic and coping expressions of marriage dissatisfaction

RQ2. How do coping mechanism and attachment styles contribute to marital dissatisfaction?

RQ3. How do African American couples feel their socioeconomic experiences can influence their marriage?

1. Tell me about your relationship history?
2. Tell me about how things around you influence your marriage?
3. Tell me about some of the memories you have about your marriage?
4. Tell me about how finances and a chance of upward mobility may influence your marriage relationship?

Appendix C

TRANSCRIPTION

ID Number	Question 1: Age
1	49
2	52
3	48
4	46
5	36
6	36
7	39

ID Number	Question 2: Married, Divorced, Separated
1	<i>Married</i>
2	<i>Married</i>
3	<i>Married</i>
4	<i>Married</i>
5	<i>Married</i>
6	<i>Married</i>
7	<i>Married</i>

ID Number	Question 3: Age when Married
1	46
2	49
3	32
4	<i>30...30,32...Let's say about 31, 32. Yes.</i>
5	33
6	33
7	32

ID Number	Question 4: Parents Marital Status
1	<i>Divorced</i>
2	<i>My parents are both deceased, and they died, my mother was a widow. (Married?)</i>
3	<i>Married</i>

4	<i>Married</i>
5	<i>Married</i>
6	<i>Married</i>
7	<i>Divorced (was 14)</i>

ID Number	Question 5: Current Household Income
1	<i>Around \$100,000</i>
2	<i>Together, about 100K</i>
3	<i>60plus?</i>
4	<i>About \$35,000 to \$37,000 a year</i>
5	<i>I think I would say around 75, 75,000.</i>
6	<i>Together, we're about 75/80,000. Somewhere in that range.</i>
7	<i>Let me see if I can give you a rough estimate...Our household income has reduced greatly. 50,000 combined.</i>

ID Number	Question 6: Definition of Marital Dissatisfaction
1	<i>You are arguing all the time. You don't feel like you have a sanctuary at home.</i>
2	<i>I think to be martially dissatisfied is that you are not getting maybe all of your needs met. And that you have or had a perceived notion of what you thought marriage would be. And then it didn't become that.</i>
3	<i>I think marital dissatisfaction means to me that the marriage is no longer growing. That the marriage has ceased from growing. That the spouses are not content with one another...And that they are no longer happy.</i>
4	<i>I think that is an area where either the couple or the one individual in the relationship is not satisfied with the other spouse. Their interaction with one another, the way they perceive one another, the way they respond to one another, it is dissatisfied in that</i>

	<i>connection. Maybe the way my spouse perceives me.</i>
5	<i>I would say unhappy more often than happy.</i>
6	<i>I would say that dissatisfaction is a situation where you have two people who failed to yield to each other's needs. And failed to communicate about it.</i>
7	<i>To be satisfied in a marriage would be to be happy and content. To understand that you are part of a team. To have respect from someone that is your spouse in all aspects of life. Your good times and your bad times, and to ultimately put God first and to pray together to get through the good times, or the bad times. And just knowing that you are loved unconditionally for the person that you are, for the type of personality that you have.</i>

ID Number	Question 7: Feelings Towards Spouse
1	<i>I love my spouse, however, I hate to put a but on it, but he gets on my nerves...He challenges everything I say.</i>
2	<i>I think that we try to get past the dissatisfaction. We try to empathize with one another about what our needs are. But I think we tend to take it for granted that you are supposed to know what the other should want or desire and so it then comes into play an ability to communicate about them. If you don't communicate that, that further feeds into that dissatisfaction.</i>
3	<i>I admire him. I greatly admire him. I love him, and am in love with him.</i>
4	<i>Well, I feel great about my spouse. She is my wife. She is a part of me, I'm a part of her. So generally, I love her dearly. Am I dissatisfied? I don't know if that's part of</i>

	<i>the question, but I feel generally good about our relationship. I feel great about her and who she is.</i>
5	<i>I love my spouse. I think he is very attentive. He tries his best to do for the family. And I know that he loves me and that's a good feeling.</i>
6	<i>I love my wife. She is the air that I breathe. It might sound a little cheesy, but she is my world. And I guess they say that you shouldn't make anybody your whole world, but truth of the matter is, she is my whole world.</i>
7	<i>I still like him...I still love him. Through good times and bad times, I know that he is there. I just know that my spouse doesn't know how to be there for me....I don't think that he is able to sometimes come from my point of view in understanding from where I am and so we have a little bit of difficulties with that. But overall, I still like him, I still love him.</i>

ID Number	Question 8: Thoughts Spouse Expressed Toward You
1	<i>He would be dissatisfied also. Sex is a huge issue for him, what we are and are not doing, cause I am closed off regarding it. That I don't trust him.</i>
2	<i>I have mixed emotions about it, because at times, I don't feel that it is adequately known or understand what is lacking. Again because of what is or isn't happening. But I think the dissatisfaction and what my wife wants, she tries to just her nature is to be a fixer or to make sure that everything is alright.</i>
3	<i>His thoughts are that I am complicated....that I'm really complicated...I think that I can be a little</i>

	<i>unpredictable. I think when he feels like he has me figured out, he finds that ok, there's still a lot to learn....Although that appears to sound negative, I think that he actually admires that...I think he admires me in both the areas of strength and weaknesses. I think that he admires them, because I think it balances us.</i>
4	<i>She thinks greatly of me. She says that I inspire her in many ways. She says that she loves me more than I love her. She also expresses how I disappoint her in many areas. She easily sees what is not right about me and she tries to correct them or she tries to expose them to me so that I can correct them.</i>
5	<i>He says he loves me. He told me that I'm a good wife. That I'm a good mother. He calls me beautiful a lot. He tells me how proud he is of me because of a lot going on right now in my life. And just of the way I handle things.</i>
6	<i>She tells me that she loves me and I don't really get much of a verbal expression in my view from her. I think she tries to love me in her language, which is acts of service. Which doesn't really speak that loudly to me, even though it is appreciated. It doesn't speak that loudly to me cause it's not my language. But every now and then she will surprise me and say something or do a little something that lets me know she cares, but she doesn't really speak as loud to me. You know, in a language that I can understand.</i>
7	<i>That I talk too much. He is proud of me, I know that. He is proud of all my accomplishments. He appreciates the fact that I am a good mom and a good stepmom to his daughter. I know my husband loves my heart. He would say</i>

	<i>that I am a good woman.</i>
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ID Number	Question 9: Marriage Experiences
1	<i>I don't think we bond well enough. I think our level of intimacy or bonding intimacy is lacking....I'm not a priority.</i>
2	<i>I think it's two-folded in regards that I think we bonded in a great way in how we met, with knowing each other and having a chemistry of being able to talk from the very beginning. Once we became married and there became maybe some pitfalls or trials or barriers to us bonding a little better when it came to being sexually involved or talking a little bit more in depth, that's where you get that break....So now I have to bag up or be able to create some space to have a moment to process this information to better bond....And so it is essential that you understand all principles, all the information I think.</i>
3	<i>Challenges and problems within the marriage bring us closer together. I try not to take anything for granted, although I enjoy good times and peaceful times, but I don't take it for granted. Because I know that we will have our share of problems, but I look at those problems or challenges that we have as an opportunity to show our love towards one another. I think that the challenges and problems that we face actually brings us closer. It helps us to get to know one another in areas that maybe we have never had a chance to observe of one another. How we handle certain problems. I think that's when my vows are challenged. That it's more than just words, but they are commitments. So that's how I see the problems and</i>

	<i>challenges. I think it strengthens the marriage.</i>
4	<i>In an early part of our marriage, anytime that my wife was dealing with something that bothered her, she would take a physical position in talking to me, which is a message in itself. That was one experience that was leading to dissatisfaction. I couldn't bond that way. And I would deal with it negatively.</i>
5	<i>As of lately, I view myself as having a healthy marriage. I'm more happy than unhappy. I mean of course there have been some negative experiences. And there was a time when I would say that my marriage was unhealthy (lots of arguing, a lot of selfishness, pride, insecurities, fear), but as of recently, I think I have a fairly healthy marriage.</i>
6	<i>Marriage is work. It's more work than my full-time job. It's a lot of mental exercise, a lot of emotional and physical work. I think it's a learning curve for me, and it's growing pains.</i>
7	<i>Growing up, I watched my parents get divorced. The fact that I am a Christian and believe in marriage and unity and having a marriage and being married to your friend to raise a family, and to have a partner for life, that is my foundation. I watched my grandparents stay together, and they were married till death do they part.....Marriage is work. You have to physically put in work.</i>

ID Number	Question 10: Communicate about often
1	<i>There is a lot of communication about money and sex. Those are the negative things. The positive things that we talk about are our relationships with God.</i>
2	<i>?</i>

3	<i>The future. Things that we desire to have. We will communicate about finances, we communicate about things that we would like to come in possession of, whether it's a house or a car or a promotion. We communicate about the Word a lot. We try to have devotions together as much as we can, even to sacrifice to make that happen. We have to sacrifice to get that time together. I think it's a balance of speaking about spiritual, health, finances, where we are emotionally.</i>
4	<i>We talk about us. We talk about our day, we talk about what we are going through in the course of a day. We talk about the Scriptures. We talk about the kids. We talk about money often.</i>
5	<i>We communicate about the children, we communicate about intimacy or sex. My husband is more of a communicator than I am. So he will communicate about his day, what happens at work. We communicate about finances. If I had to put them in order, I would probably say: communication about sex and intimacy is number 1, then kids, and then finances.</i>
6	<i>We don't do a whole lot of it. I think a conversation in my definition is an act of exchange for both parties. With a come and go. I don't think I get that from her. It's usually, I engage her, I probe her. I may or may not get information that I am requesting. I don't know if we really know how to talk to each other yet.</i>
7	<i>The kids' schedule. Finances, and family factors. Our parents and those that are around us that affect us in some way.</i>

ID Number	Question 11: Family, Those Around
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	Influence Perception of Satisfied Marriage
1	<i>I Unfortunately, had an idealistic view of marriage. From watching TV, reading all the books I have read...And then watching my friends and my parents be married and what I thought should happen to him and I. I had a lot of ideals.</i>
2	<i>If I had to use my family and folk around me, I don't have no real good examples. If I use that as a method for really kind of being the parameter, there's been a lot of divorces. And society as a whole, if you really looked at it, you wouldn't give marriage a chance, you wouldn't give marriage a shot.</i>
3	<i>I think our church family is a strong influence. To fight for marriage when you are looking at it from a spiritual scope, Christ versus the Devil...I believe that the church family is a strong influence to make right decisions to endure, to persevere, to go through long suffering, and to know that it's not strange to suffer or to be challenged in your marriage...I believe fellowshiping with one another, and letting you know that there's nothing new under the sun, that you aren't facing some new thing that we haven't already gone through....Of course my parents are a strong influence.</i>
4	<i>In my family, I always thought that my mom was not satisfied. I always thought that my dad was not satisfied....There was a constant disconnect. So how do they influence me? I took that positively. I turned it around positively.</i>
5	<i>My parents have had some rocky times in their marriage. I would probably view their marriage as being ok. My husband and I have been through counseling. I realize that everybody's got some issues in</i>

	<i>their marriage. Nobody's marriage is perfect. It makes me look at what I have, and it's a blessing because we have come a long way and it could be a lot worse than it is. And it could be better than what it is. Just because we might have some issues in our marriage, I still perceive our marriage as being a healthy marriage.</i>
6	<i>I don't know if I have any really good examples to follow cause my mom and dad over the years seem to have a lot of fighting, and a whole lot of hangups and hurt feelings that never really seemed to get resolved. And that's the example that I have to go by.</i>
7	<i>Communication and downtime. Life is gonna keep you busy. But you need to stop and talk to each other. If you don't stop and the couple themselves have some down time, it's gonna get away from you. Life is gonna get in the way regardless.</i>

ID Number	Question 12: Seeing things differently
1	<i>We see differently on a lot of different things. I often tell him there's more than one way to skin a cat.</i>
2	<i>I think my spouse sees it differently because she thinks that I'm working. I work and I put my physical fitness, my overall health in the mix and so that time kinda battles with the time that I think that she thinks I should put in with her and that creates a dissatisfaction.</i>
3	<i>We see a lot of things differently. I'm an observer and I'm a thinker, and so, I look at a situation, and we're bumping heads, with our views or are seeing things through a different perspective, I think it has a lot to do with the way we were raised.</i>
4	<i>She has helped me see the things that I</i>

	<i>don't see, and a lot of times I don't see anything. But then sometimes, when she sees she is helping me, sometimes when she is wrong, or it's hard sometimes for me to disagree with her.</i>
5	<i>Being that we have different needs, He may view a healthy marriage as consisting of the more sex you have, the healthier your marriage is. Being able to listen and speak both sides is a really health marriage. One of the key components of a health marriage is being able to communicate effectively.</i>
6	<i>It seems like we see everything differently. I seem to be more of a pessimist and she seems to be more of an optimist.</i>
7	<i>To be honest with you, we kinda are on the same page....But I do think we have a communication breakdown there (with scheduling). We don't see eye to eye there. And overall, as far as any decisions, he leaves them up to me, and then when I ask, he gets upset.</i>

ID Number	Question 13: Interact with each Other
1	<i>Right now it's shaky. We will have weeks or days of, it seems to me that we have bonded well. That we get along well and I love him to pieces, and then in a flash, he will say or do something or don't say or do something and it's on and popping and it just stinks....I would like us to not argue so much.</i>
2	<i>I think we are hit and miss. Sometimes we ebb and flow and we do really well. To have a good time and I think other times we then miss that mark. But other times, then there's another time where we will ebb and glow. We will be in together and we will be in sync.</i>
3	<i>We get along very well. We laugh, we talk,</i>

	<i>we communicate. I look forward to seeing him and chatting with him about my day. I believe it's vise versa. We enjoy a lot of the same things, desire to do a lot of the same things...</i>
4	<i>It's peaceful. It's more peaceful now than it was in the past. I'm in more control more of my tone now.</i>
5	<i>We have physical interaction. We always set aside a time in the evening when the kids are in bed to have that us time. Whether we use it to talk or to watch TV. That's out bonding time. So that's mainly how we interact. Most of our negative interactions come because, most of it is about sex and intimacy. His high need for it, and mine doesn't match that so that's where a lot of our negative interactions come in.</i>
6	<i>I think we interact with each other pretty good. It depends on what is going on. If I am working and giving her the benefit of the doubt, and I'm being conscious of keeping my anger down and not being explosive and reactive, we seem to get along pretty good. She's not much of a communicator..I feel rejected, pushed away, and isolated.</i>
7	<i>I have labeled me and him as Edith and Archie Bonker. The little angry old man who got a big old heart. And the sweet little old lady that, she don't care what Archie says, she do her own thing. That's where we are right now. We can change, but that's just where we are right now.</i>

ID Number	Question 14: Relationship History
1	<i>I haven't had a lot of long term relationships. I had a lot of short-lived relationships before my husband. He is the longest relationship I have ever had. The</i>

	<i>longest intimate relationship I have ever had, to put it that way. Everything else has lasted no longer than four years.</i>
2	<i>?</i>
3	<i>I come from a large family...and I had a chance to observe my brothers and sisters mistakes. I observed their relationships and their friends and the company that they kept. I chose to be a more of a loner, and I was fine with that, I was content with that...I didn't want to date. My sisters and my brothers dated and I think they wore me out so much with all of their issues. I had friends, I had guys pursue me, and I was totally un-interested. I was in a previous marriage, and I married someone who was in the military and I think I married too early.</i>
4	<i>I bond mainly sexually. And in the overall history with the opposite sex, first thought on my mind. How good they look, and then later on, more than that, how they thought, how intelligent were they....But I sold myself out to that. Just sexual desire, pretty much. And to look good in the presence of others because of who was with me.</i>
5	<i>I was married before..my marriage lasted for two years. In between divorcing and meeting my husband, I didn't date a whole lot....</i>
6	<i>I've not been the most stable person. I have been known to rush into things. Catch feelings real quick. Want to get into a relationship, get emotionally and sexually involved right away. I'm usually the romantic. The one looking for love and I'm all in, relatively quick. Rushing into things is never good. It's been disastrous.... So I can't tell you what it would feel like to take it slow, cause I have never done that. I feel like I would get involved with one</i>

	<i>young lady, and then move on to the next one, I wouldn't leave myself time to get over the last one. I would leave one and jump right into the next one as soon as I could and then it would cause problems. So I feel that I carry a lot of baggage to the next relationship and I see that now, too bad I didn't see that, it took me 36 years to figure that out.</i>
7	<i>Most of my relationships have been long-term. What I mean by long-term is over a year...I have had some short-term relationships. I guess I always kept the relationship still on the friendship basis...I tell people all the time, when you get married, you have to marry your friend, because that person is an individual.</i>

ID Number	Question 15: Things around you Influencing Marriage
1	<i>Our money. Our finances definitely affect our relationship. Where we live....A lot, right now the biggest issues are finances, my medical challenges and sex.</i>
2	<i>Well my girl feels dissatisfied with her look, with her style, with her own personal charisma, and I had to find out, that it was due to maybe health issues and then psychologically she has always been on top of it. She ain't never had to be down at the bottom, alright, and so as she was going and working and growing up, she's always been at the top of the curve where she has been as her social status. Now her economic status has kinda fallen and changed cause of the whole economic climate, and it, and she sometimes still holds on to what she wants, yet won't let go of everything so she clear it and then come back up to what you are going through. Where me, on the other side, I</i>

	<i>realize I had to put all my clothes in the car, left all my bed, all my furniture, couldn't take nothing with me.</i>
3	<i>I see a lot of marriages break up and I believe that the marriages could have been saved. So other failed marriages cause me to bond closer to my husband. It causes me to see it more than just problems with one another.</i>
4	<i>Church life really influenced us positively. We have had some money problems, and the way I behave with money really causes our relationship to not be in the area of satisfaction, which I am really working on that now, like never before. So money, church, kids.</i>
5	<i>Looking at family members and other people going through certain things.</i>
6	<i>The only things that really affect my marriage are the things that are close to me like my kids, my financial situation or something like that, all that affects me.</i>
7	<i>His daddy got divorced three times. His mother has been divorced twice....You still gotta go for what you want, not what had happened.</i>

ID Number	Question 16: Memories of marriage
1	<i>We go to Quik Trip and just sit and relax and chill out and eat hot dogs in the car, and it's very cute. Very high school ish, but nice. We'll go get a cup of coffee late at night and sit in the driveway and talk for hours....We are not arguing. No arguing, we are just kinda eating and relaxing and laughing.</i>
2	<i>We are still very young, but I think we have some good memories. When we traveled together. We had a few better memories as to even before we were married.....I think our ability to have dinner and walk and laugh....Bad</i>

	<i>memories include all the fussing and the fighting.</i>
3	<i>When we first met, I think that's a great memory of where I met my husband. We met on the job, and I think it's a great memory because the job where we worked, we had a lot of hungry men, and so when I was interested in my husband, it kind of baffled the other men around him.....When I met my husband, he had such a real, warm smile and it was so genuine and that just captivated me....Having our children, carrying his children was definitely a memorable moment.</i>
4	<i>I love the memory of us coming together...She was pulling me in so I could not only share about my problems, I can share about my likes, what inspires me, what I dream about.</i>
5	<i>The most recent memory, family vacations. Date nights. We have had some pretty good date nights. We also have separated twice.</i>
6	<i>I got a lot of good memories. I think it's about half and half cause we just starting out, January 8 will be three years, and we spent roughly two thirds of that time in controversy. But we are creating good memories now.</i>
7	<i>We had a wonderful wedding, a wonderful reception. We traveled, or we did travel a lot. We still go on trips for family stuff. I decided not to divorce him after I found out I had a step-child. We have had out good times and our bad times. And when we do have some down time, we are able to giggle and play.</i>

ID Number	Question 17: Chance at Upward Mobility
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1	<i>It would affect it greatly. It won't cure all the problems, but it would certainly I think be a relief as far as what we buy, when we buy it....It would affect where we travel, where we eat....It wouldn't solve everything cause money isn't everything and we all know that but it would definitely solve some of our life issues and concerns that might change how we act with each other, I would hope.</i>
2	<i>I think finances would be a great way of helping us to stabilize and get to where we would like to be. I don't think money makes me but I think I make money and if I could do more with money, it allows the exchange of me to do the work that God will have me to do.</i>
3	<i>I think it would destroy us. And I'm sure my husband would say the same thing. Because I have thought about that so many times. I think it would affect us in a negative way....Anything beyond being comfortable is a fear, because I don't know myself well enough to say I would be grounded.</i>
4	<i>It's already started because I'm starting to budget. I'm focused intently on my money spending habits....I think she is seeing how focused I am, how responsible I am, and how as a man, I'm beginning to really financially take care of the home which is one of her desires....And it is changing the dynamics of our relationship because she is able to put more of her trust in me.</i>
5	<i>I think it would be an excellent influence. We both have goals, things we want to accomplish, so of course that would help us achieve our goals. We are on the same page. It wouldn't cause me to love him any more or less...It would increase the security of our future, which would be less</i>

	<i>stressful.</i>
6	<i>I think that would have a tremendous effect on my relationship because that speaks to her love language, acts of service more. I have noticed that our relationship has gotten a lot better since I have gotten a part time job and the financial pressure has been taken away. So money is not much of an issue...Before then, we were arguing and fighting constantly. And it was constant financial struggles all the time, and she didn't want to have sex, she was worrying about money and stuff and money would really turn things around, and relieve a lot of worry for her. Me too, but mostly her.</i>
7	<i>I think that would put a light above his head, and emotionally he would need it. I mean, I need it too, but we would stay focused. We would give our 10% to the church and maybe more....we would make sure that the kids are set...we would pay off our bills, set up for us in retirement, set up for the kids to have something for their kids....We would get a financial planner.</i>

ID Number	Question 18: Advice for couples
1	<i>The biggest thing I think is learning how to submit. Not submissive but learning how to submit....I didn't want to submit to his authority, his position in our relationship, although I wanted him to be there. I wanted to be married, I wanted to marry him, but I didn't want to submit. So oftentimes, I would suggest to women to practice submitting at some point in time, not to a boyfriend, but learning how to let go of being the boss at the job, or the boss at your house, and learning you have to share that responsibility and fall back so he can be in his position and support him in that position.</i>

2	<i>I think you have to be able to go in it with your eyes open and be mindful of your partner, who you are marrying...If we follow God's precepts and His commandments, He put a great thing together in marriage. If you go in it right, I don't think that you will have any problems.</i>
3	<i>Pre-marital counseling is vital. Having your credit report, being able to exchange credit reports, to exchange criminal records, to exchange medical reports. I think that if you're going to commit to someone, I think that if you are going to invest your life with someone, I think all of those things should be in your face.</i>
4	<i>I would tell a young African-American male that a woman seeks and needs security. Security in their spouse in every area. They need and desire a man to completely cover them. Protect them and protection has, this kind of protection has nothing to do with muscle strength. Which a lot of men think. Although that's good, they want you to be strong financially....You are responsible for her and you have to take on the challenge of being better so you can fulfill that responsibility. And you need to be accountable so honesty.</i>
5	<i>Learning or knowing how to manage conflict in the right way will be the key to having a happy marriage or an unhappy marriage. For most of the African Americans I know, it's a lot about sometimes being afraid to express emotions. I think it's important to find a way to express yourself. It's a matter of knowing your spouse and knowing how to communicate with them.</i>
6	<i>I would tell them that you can't put conditions on love. And when you make</i>

	<i>that choice to enter that covenant, you have to go into it with a made up mind that you are gonna love that person no matter what they do. And you have to constantly turn the other cheek, constantly forgive, constantly do what's in their best interest, no matter how you feel about what's going on between you and them.</i>
7	<i>To the man- you about to marry this woman that you love dearly and greatly. Continue to treat her as a queen. She is your support and help system. Tell her. Let her know what your needs and your wants are. Keep it simple. And say it before you get married, so she knows what she is walking into. Don't expect her to pull miracles you can't perform. Ladies, make sure that he is your friend. Make sure you tell him how you feel and what you need as well. Always connect. Men, don't lie about your money. Don't expect your spouse to be perfect or fix your flaws. They are there to help you fix your flaws.</i>